**“We gon’ be alright”: Racism, Media, and the Sociopolitical Development of Black Youth**

by

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## DEDICATION

*"Remember all the women who wrote for you, all the Women like you, with skin like yours. Women who were Once enslaved. Women who were once colonized. Women who hold languages that when you try to speak It, it tears your tongue wide open. Remember all these Women who were singers, poets, priestesses, artists, Healers, whose lives were declared anonymous, whose Paintings hang in foreign museums as "unknown" Whose lives declared as unlived. Remember them."*

Ijeoma Umebinyou

I dedicate this dissertation to the ancestors and the elders that built, resisted, achieved, sacrificed so that I might be here and have the privilege of telling our truth.

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## PREFACE

In the summer of 2015, Kendrick Lamar, a prominent hip-hop artist from Compton, California, released his hit single “Alright”. In his song, Kendrick discusses the manifestations of structural racism that impact Black Americans and the detrimental impact of racism on his psychological well-being. He also calls on his faith in God, highlights the historical resiliency of Black Americans, and reminds the Black community that, despite the personal and collective barriers that we face, “We gon' be alright.”

Kendrick’s song “Alright” is an ode to Black pain, healing, and liberation. As a Black woman and an advocate of social justice, the song spoke to the frustration and pain that I experience when seeing Black men, women, girls, and boys killed unlawfully by law enforcement and marginalized in multiple sectors of American society (e.g., education, justice system). Yet, the song also provided a beacon of hope and encouragement to remain engaged in work that improves the plight of Black people. Kendrick’s “Alright” quickly became one of the soundtracks to the Black Lives Matter movement, with protesters chanting the lyrics of the song as they marched.

As a scholar, I quickly identified how Kendrick’s work contains messages that could promote Black adolescents’ awareness of racial inequality, ability to cope with marginalization, and desire to engage in behaviors to promote social justice. Inspired by the works of Kendrick Lamar and the legacy of Black activists, my dissertation examines the factors that shape Black youth’s resistance and how resistance relates to youth’s well-being in the face of racism.

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## ABSTRACT

Racism is a persistent sociopolitical force that adversely impacts Black youth's development. However, many Black youth resist racism through racial justice activism using both traditional (e.g., attending a protest or rally) and online action (e.g., creating or sharing political and social issues online) (Hope & Jagers, 2014; Hope, Keels, & Durkee, 2016; Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). Nevertheless, limited work has empirically examined the factors that promote Black youth's sociopolitical action. My dissertation addresses the gaps in the literature by examining both theoretically and empirically: 1) the sociocultural factors that may shape Black youth's race-focused sociopolitical action and 2) the impact of sociopolitical action on Black youth's mental health.

Sociopolitical development (SPD) describes the process of developing an awareness of and engaging in action to address the systems that contribute to inequality (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). Previous work on SPD examined a broad awareness of the presence of structural inequity without focusing on a specific type of oppression like race. In study one, I introduce an integrative model that identifies the racial sociocultural factors that could prompt Black youth's SPD about race. In the model, I demonstrated that Black youth's racial identity, experiences of racial discrimination, and the messages they receive about race (e.g., racial socialization) could: 1) inform how they make meaning of racial barriers on a structural level and 2) lead to their activism against racism. I test components of this model in studies two and three with a sample of 500 Black adolescents (ages 13-17) from across the United States recruited through a Qualtrics Research Panel.

Study two examines the relationship between racial discrimination and Black youth's race-focused sociopolitical action and the impact of sociopolitical action on mental health. The findings suggest that youth's direct racial discriminatory experiences may be more impactful in facilitating their traditional and online sociopolitical action than their vicarious racial discriminatory experiences. Although sociopolitical action has often been conceptualized as a protective factor against racism, study two found evidence that online sociopolitical action can be associated with more anxiety and depressive symptoms and may exacerbate the relations between vicarious discrimination and symptomology. The findings highlight a need to examine further the impact of sociopolitical action on youth well-being.

Hip-hop has a historical significance as a cultural art form that Black Americans have used to promote cultural pride and resist structural inequity (Rose, 1994). Study three examines hip-hop culture as a form of racial socialization that could promote Black youth's SPD. The findings reveal that rap music videos and youth's engagement with hip-hop media (e.g., blogs, video shows, artists' social media) were more influential than exposure to rap music in promoting youth's agency and sociopolitical action. Furthermore, youth's perceptions of the content of rap music (e.g., beliefs that hip-hop is empowering or violent) had differential effects on SPD outcomes. The findings suggest that Black media and arts can be a context for youth's SPD.

Collectively, this dissertation advances research on sociopolitical development by examining theoretically and empirically the role of racialized and cultural experiences in shaping Black youth's racial sociopolitical beliefs and actions. This work can be impactful in identifying the mechanisms to promote Black youth's social awareness and advocacy and in developing strategies to promote their psychological well-being as they engage in action.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Adolescence is an important period during which young people are creating their sense of self, identity, and beliefs about the world. It is also a period where youth begin the process of transitioning to adulthood, when their decisions and behaviors have more significant implications for their life outcomes (Fuligni & Hardway, 2004). Therefore, adolescence is an important period to examine critically the factors that promote youth's ability to thrive developmentally. For Black youth and other youth of color, a part of their ability to thrive is related to their ability to navigate social stratification (García Coll et al., 1996). Black Americans have been marginalized and discriminated against in the United States historically, starting with their mass enslavement and subsequent systematic disenfranchisement. Structural racism (e.g., low resourced schools and harsher legal sentences) and interpersonal racism (e.g., racial discrimination from peers, teachers, and police officers) have deleterious implications for developmental outcomes of Black youth (Benner & Graham, 2013; Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2005; Cogburn, Chavous, & Griffin, 2011; Evans, 2005; Moore & Padavic, 2010; Stewart, Baumer, Brunson, & Simons, 2009). Many studies have linked experiences of racial discrimination to deleterious outcomes, such as low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and poor academic achievement (Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2009; Seaton, Caldwell, Sellers, & Jackson, 2010).

Black youth, however, are not passive recipients of racial marginalization. Across decades, Black youth have played integral roles in social justice movements to resist racism through massive protest (e.g., Children's Crusade of 1963) and through organizations (e.g., NAACP Youth & College Division). A recent study found that 65% of Black youth report being

engaged in Black Lives Matter, a movement that has been instrumental in bringing discussion about issues impacting Black Americans to mainstream society (Hope et al., Keels, & Durkee, 2016). Yet, limited work has examined the factors that promote Black youth's engagement in racial justice activism nor the implications of youth's activism for their development. My dissertation seeks to address these gaps by theoretically and empirically examining the factors that promote Black youth's sociopolitical development, the process of developing an awareness of and engaging in action to address the systems that contribute to inequality.

**Sociopolitical Development**

Sociopolitical development (SPD) reflects an understanding of the sociopolitical factors (i.e. culture, politics, and economics) that contribute to one's social status (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). SPD is connected theoretically to Paulo Freire's conceptualization of *conscientizacao*– the process by which the oppressed and the oppressors develop a critical awareness of social inequity and methods for liberation (Diemer, Rapa, Voight, & McWhirter, 2016; Freire, 1993). Thus**,** SPD involves not only an awareness of social inequalities but also an ability to visualize a just society and a desire to engage in social justice behaviors (Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999; Watts et al., 2003). Through the process of SPD, individuals grow holistically in their knowledge base, their critical analytical skills, their ability to regulate and control emotions, and their competency in political and social change (Watts et al., 2003).

SPD includes the development of critical *social analysis*, the ability to analyze the systems that produce social inequality, and s*ociopolitical action*, behaviors initiated to overturn structural and individual oppression (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Social analysis is a precursor to engagement in change, meaning that an individual must be conscious of social inequity to engage in sociopolitical activism. However, as theorized by Watts and Flanagan (2007), youth

must also have a *sense of agency*, which is described as individual, collective, and political efficacy. Adolescents with a sense of agency believe in their ability to be change makers, recognize that they can impact policy, and believe that their group can organize to address common problems or goals, which can propel them into action.

**Black Youth's Sociopolitical Development**

For Black youth in the United States, awareness about racial structural inequity is a critical aspect of their sociopolitical development. The United States was built on racial and ethnic stratification starting with the genocide of Native Americans and subsequently the enslavement of people of African ancestry. Following the abolition of slavery, systems of racial stratification were sustained through Jim Crow laws, economic disenfranchisement, and unequal educational conditions. As discussed by García Coll and colleagues (1996), social stratification and social position are factors that are core to the developmental process of youth of color, particularly issues of race and ethnicity and economics. Racism and oppression create segregated conditions that impact the development of youth of color. For example, Black youth are more likely than White youth to attend schools, that have uncertified teachers, to be suspended and expelled, and to be placed in special education (Blanchett, 2006; Clotfelter et al., 2005; Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda., 2015; Noguera, 2016). Further, Black youth are vastly overrepresented in the criminal justice system: Black youth are five times more likely to be incarcerated than all other youth and more likely to receive punitive discipline instead of therapeutic intervention unlike their White peers (Annie Casey Foundation, 2013; Fisher, Jackson, & Villarruel, 1998). Black youth's understanding of the social determinants that shape inequality can alleviate their likelihood of internalizing racial disparities as a reflection of the deficits in their ethnic group (Bañales et al., 2019). Furthermore, by engaging in resistance

against racial inequality, Black youth are able to actively address systems that contribute to detrimental outcomes.

SPD theorists have rooted the literature on the process and significance of SPD in the experiences of Black Americans. For example, Watts and colleagues (1999) describe SPD as a remedy for racial oppression and highlight that the ability to maintain an affirmative cultural identity, despite marginalization, is essential for the SPD of Black Americans. Furthermore, scholars have highlighted the need for Black Americans to develop an identity that incorporates their cultural heritage as well as the sociopolitical legacy of their culture as being beneficial in Black American's ability to resist against racial oppression (Watts et al., 2003). This literature provides a foundation in understanding the saliency of race in the SPD of Black people. However, an important next step includes identifying the process by which racialized experiences and beliefs contribute to SPD.

**Developmental Significance**

Adolescence may be a particularly pertinent time to examine the sociocultural factors that contribute to Black youth's SPD. Adolescence is characterized as a period of identity exploration where youth are developing their own ideological beliefs and constructing their beliefs about themselves (Erikson, 1968). Youth experience dynamic changes in their cognitive abilities, including building the capacity for metacognition and abstract thinking, which can contribute to their ability to deeply processes racialized experiences (e.g., discrimination and socialization) (Hughes, Watford, & Del Toro, 2016; Spears Brown, & Bigler, 2005). Furthermore, during adolescence, youth become increasingly independent, which may provide opportunities for them to be critically engaged in sociopolitical action in their schools and community.

Black adolescents' SPD can have positive implications for their psychological development. Hope and Spencer (2017) theorize that Black youth use sociopolitical action as a coping mechanism to alleviate the negative impacts of racism on their well-being. Indeed, scholars have found that sociopolitical behaviors in adolescence are linked to higher life satisfaction and educational attainment in early adulthood (Chan, Ou, & Reynolds, 2014). Further, indicators of SPD have been found to be associated with youth of color's increased vocational expectations and increased saliency of thriving in work (Diemer et al., 2010). Thus, youth's awareness of structural inequality and actions to combat inequality has positive implications for their well-being and their life trajectory.

**Relevance of Political Climate to SPD**

Understanding the racial sociocultural factors that contribute to SPD of Black youth may be particularly important given the current political climate in the United States. In many regards, the United States continues to be a racially contentious and hostile context, specifically for Black Americans. For example, in 2016, the majority of hate crimes committed in the United States (57.5 %) were race-related (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). Although Black Americans make up about 13.1% of the United States population, 50.2% of race-related hate crimes were targeted towards Black people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018; U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). Furthermore, in 2016, the United States elected Donald Trump, a White multimillionaire whose rise to power has contributed to the increased mainstream visibility of White nationalist movements and has fueled hate crimes against marginalized groups, particularly in school contexts (Tatum, 2017). As the nation transitions from Barack Obama, the first Black president, to Donald Trump, a racially controversial president, it is a unique time to examine the process of Black youth's SPD.

Black Americans have been actively engaged in collective resistance against racial injustice. In 2013, the Black Lives Matter movement emerged in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watchman, who racially profiled and killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenage boy (Garza, 2016). The Black Lives Matter movement began as a social media hashtag but emerged into a multifaceted movement focused on motivating action that is oriented to addressing social inequity, most notably in reference to police misconduct (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2016; Rickford, 2016). Black public figures, such as hip-hop artists, politicians, activists, and athletes, have participated in the dialogue and activism aimed to discuss issues impacting the Black community (Harlow & Benbrook, 2019). Thus, Black youth's exposure to media or community-based discussion about racial issues may have implications for their SPD.

## Present Study

Across three studies, my dissertation seeks to address the gaps in the literature by theoretically and empirically examining sociocultural factors that may shape the SPD of Black youth and examining implications of SPD on Black youth's mental health.

### Study One

In study one, I introduce an integrative model situating racial sociocultural processes (i.e., racial identity, racial socialization, and experiences of racial discrimination) within the current sociopolitical development theory. I argue that Black youth's experiences of racial discrimination can prompt their awareness of structures of social inequality (i.e., critical social analysis) and their engagement in action against social inequality (i.e., sociopolitical action) (Benner & Graham, 2013; Hope, Skoog, & Jagers, 2015; White-Johnson, 2012). However, Black youth's racial identity and experiences of racial socialization may be impactful in the ways that

they make meaning of experiences of racial discrimination and the impact of these experiences on youth's SPD (Hughes et al., 2016). Further, Black youth's racial identity and experiences of racial socialization may directly prompt their critical social analysis around race and sociopolitical action. I conclude with recommendations for further empirical research and practice. Studies two and three build upon the theoretical framework introduced in study one to examine empirically the sociocultural factors that promote SPD, and to examine the implications of SPD on Black youth's mental health.

**Study Two**

Study two uses a sample of 500 Black adolescents (ages 13-17) to examine the relations between experiences of direct and vicarious racial discrimination and Black youth's race-focused sociopolitical action. Black youth have used social media as a mechanism to raise awareness around social justice issues (Cohen, Kahne, Bowyer, Middaugh, & Rogowski, 2012; Hope et al., 2016). Thus, I examine two forms of sociopolitical action: traditional action (e.g., attending a protest or rally, joining a political group) and online action (e.g., creating or sharing political and social issues, contacting public officials online). Consistent with the theoretical discussion of SPD as a mechanism for the healing of Black youth (Ginwright, 2010; Hope & Spencer, 2017; Watts et al., 1999), the second aim of study two is to examine whether Black youth's engagement in action (traditional and online) is protective against the negative mental health implications (e.g., anxiety and depressive symptoms) of racial discrimination.

**Study Three**

Study three focuses on examining the role of hip-hop culture in Black youth's SPD. Hip-hop has a historical significance as a cultural art form that Black Americans have used to promote cultural pride and resist against structural inequity (Alridge, 2005; Rose, 1994). As

argued in study one, the messages that youth hear about race (e.g., racial socialization) can inform their Black youth's social analysis and sociopolitical action (Anyiwo, Bañales, Rowley, Watkins, & Richards-Schuster, 2018a). Drawing on the Adolescent Media Practice Model (Steele & Brown, 1995) and the individual and collective empowerment framework (Travis, 2013), I argue that Black youth's engagement in hip-hop media can be a mechanism by which they can self-socialize and extract messages that can facilitate their SPD. Using the same sample of Black youth from study two, I examine whether Black youth's engagement with hip-hop culture (e.g., rap music, rap music videos, hip-hop media, and hip-hop artists' social media) relates to their SPD. Secondly, I examine whether youth's perceptions of hip-hop (e.g., beliefs about the dominant content in hip-hop) moderate the relation between hip-hop use and Black youth's SPD.

## Chapter 2: Study One Sociocultural Influences on the Sociopolitical Development of African American Youth

Globally, Black people (i.e., people of African ancestry) experience racial bias rooted in systems of racial oppression (e.g., slavery, apartheid, and colonization) (Neville & Cross, 2017). Black youth in these nations have resisted oppression by engaging in political movements (e.g., South African Students' Movement and Black Lives Matter) (Diseko, 1992; Hope et al., 2016). However, few studies have examined the factors that promote youth's understanding of oppression and engagement in activism. Sociopolitical development (SPD) theory describes the process by which individuals develop an awareness of and act against sociopolitical factors (i.e., culture, politics, and economics) that contribute to inequitable social systems (Diemer et al., 2016; Watts et al., 2003). Scholars identify racism as influential in the SPD of racially oppressed groups (Watts et al., 1999; Watts et al., 2003), yet few studies identify the underlying racial processes that shape youth's SPD. In this study, we propose a framework for contextualizing sociocultural factors in the SPD of Black youth. Although the sociocultural factors that we consider (e.g., racial socialization, racial identity, and racial discrimination) are likely to be relevant to the SPD of youth from other backgrounds, much of the literature on the sociocultural influences on development is rooted in the experiences of African Americans. Thus, we focus on African American youth as a case study that may be extended to other marginalized groups.

We begin with an overview of SPD theory and sociocultural factors that are influential in African American youth's development. Next, we describe connections between these

sociocultural factors and aspects of African American youth's SPD and propose a conceptual model. We conclude with considerations for future work.

**Sociopolitical Development**

Paulo Freire's conceptualization of conscientizacao (Portuguese for conscientization) includes the process by which the oppressed and the oppressors develop a critical awareness of social inequity and methods for liberation (Freire, 1993). SPD theory shares theoretical roots with critical consciousness (Diemer et al., 2016), empowerment (Christens, Winn, & Duke, 2016), and social justice youth development (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002), which all incorporate aspects of Freire's notion of *conscientizacao***.** Each of these theories describes how and why individuals develop an awareness of structural oppression and disrupt marginalization. Because SPD theorists have often focused on the experiences of African Americans (e.g., Watts et al., 1999; Watts et al., 2003), we build on this literature to identify the process by which sociocultural factors shape SPD for African American youth.

SPD includes critical *social analysis* – the ability to analyze the systems that produce inequality, as well as *sociopolitical action* – behaviors initiated to overturn structural and individual oppression (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Social analysis is theorized to precede youth's engagement in change, meaning that youth must be conscious of social inequity to engage in sociopolitical action. However, relations between action and analysis might be bi-directional: engagement in action may also contribute to social analysis.

SPD has implications for psychological development. Although experiences of discrimination can harm development, sociopolitical action can alleviate the impact of racism, increase satisfaction with life, and raise educational attainment among African American youth and young adults (Chan et al., 2014; Hope & Spencer, 2017). Youth's sociopolitical action also

has a collective benefit because it can result in community and social change (Diemer et al., 2016). Hence, understanding the factors that facilitate African American youth's SPD is important for facilitating their well-being and addressing the social structures that disrupt their development.

Our model of the sociocultural influences on youth's SPD reflects the notion that SPD is rooted in adolescents' environments (i.e., home, school, community) (Watts et al., 2003) and is transactional, with interplay between an adolescent's characteristics (i.e., features, ideologies) and their sociopolitical engagement. In this way, African American youth's racialized experiences and beliefs contribute to their understanding of social inequality and engagement in action.

## Sociocultural Factors

We argue that African American youth's sociocultural factors (e.g., experiences with racial discrimination, racial socialization, and racial identity) are integral to their SPD. Issues of race, culture, racial identity, and racial discrimination are likely to be particularly salient during adolescence because youth are actively building identities (Erikson, 1968). Adolescents' gains in metacognition, abstract thinking, and social cognition inform their exploration of racial identity and strengthen their ability to identify discrimination on an individual and structural level (Hughes et al., 2016; Spears Brown & Bigler, 2005; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Indeed, African American youth have reported experiencing more types of racial discrimination as they age (Martin et al., 2011). These increases are likely a result of their cognitive gains as well as increased independence in adolescence that can leave youth more susceptible to racial bias (Hughes et al., 2016). During adolescence, parents discuss more often racial discrimination with their children and how to cope with it (Hughes et al., 2016). Thus, adolescents' perceptions of

and responses to racial discrimination can be facilitated by their parents' racial socialization messages (Spears Brown & Bigler, 2005). Taken together, the internal and external changes during adolescence can be influential in the type of racialized experiences that African American youth have and how they process them (Hughes et al., 2016).

**Racial Discrimination**

A key attribute of SPD is the awareness of social inequality (i.e., social analysis) (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Youth might develop this awareness through direct and vicarious experiences with racial discrimination. In one study with African American, Asian, and Latinx adolescents (Benner & Graham, 2013), adolescents' perceptions of racial discrimination were associated with their consciousness about how racial groups are treated in society. Furthermore, African American college youth's experiences of racial discrimination are related to their beliefs about sociopolitical action (e.g., Black people should fight against injustice and racism) and their engagement in action (White-Johnson, 2012). Beyond direct experiences with racial discrimination, African American youth are also likely to develop skills in social analysis as they witness discrimination experienced by others (Hope et al., 2015). For example, Trayvon Martin, an African American teenager who was shot and killed by a neighborhood watchman, became the catalyst for the Black Lives Matter movement, a movement that has contributed to increased discourse around issues of race and police brutality (Garza, 2016). Public discourse around the killing of unarmed African Americans has promoted awareness of and activism against racism (Neville & Cross, 2017).

Experiencing discrimination does not automatically lead youth to reflect on racial inequality or become engaged in action. Youth might experience discrimination but be unaware of it, or they may interpret discrimination as an individual slight and not a larger systemic issue.

However, racial socialization and racial identity may influence youth's understanding of and action against discrimination. Scholars argue that racial identity, racial socialization, and discrimination "are interdependent, co-occurring and, indeed, mutually defining elements of a system of racial knowledge that youth configure, reconfigure, and act upon" (Hughes et al., 2016, p. 5). Hence, we argue that the interplay among sociocultural factors (i.e., racial discrimination, identity, and socialization) shapes African American youth's ability to analyze inequality (social analysis) and engage in social justice behaviors (sociopolitical action).

**Racial Socialization**

Racial socialization is a mechanism by which youth shape their beliefs about their racial group and understand the history and values of their group (Hughes et al., 2016). The two most common forms of racial socialization reported by parents and children are *cultural socialization* (emphasizing racial/ethnic pride, cultural history and traditions) and *preparation for bias* (educating about the reality of racial inequality and preparing youth on how to respond to discrimination) (see Hughes et al., 2006 for a full review). Racial socialization can directly promote youth's positive development and affect the impact that racial discrimination has on their developmental outcomes (Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umaña-Taylor, 2012). Accordingly, we argue that the impact of racial discrimination on African American youth's SPD is likely informed by the messages about race they receive from people they know (e.g., parents) as well as from people distant from them (e.g., public figures).

Cultural socialization that focuses on history and pride may lead to social analysis and sociopolitical action. Parents and schools that convey messages about African American culture can stimulate youth's social analysis (Aldana & Byrd, 2015). Culturally relevant pedagogy, a form of cultural socialization that highlights African Americans' experiences with social

inequality, is theorized to facilitate students' SPD (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Common cultural socialization practices include parents' discussing Black history with their children and accompanying their children to Black cultural events. These practices might sensitize Black youth to race or raise their awareness of social movements. Indeed, a recent study found that African American youth who were culturally socialized more than their peers had greater social analysis and, in turn, more engagement in their communities (i.e., sociopolitical action) (Lozada, Jagers, Smith, Bañales, & Hope, 2017).

Messages that prepare youth for bias can make youth aware of systemic and individual racial discrimination in the United States and provide guidance on how to respond. These messages may include discussions of youth experiencing racial discrimination or society's devaluing of Black people. African American youth may use these messages to develop a social analysis that includes an awareness of the structural determinants that cause social inequality. Furthermore, youth may receive messages that encourage them to cope with racism through sociopolitical action. For example, African American activists describe how adult caregivers' modeling of community activism, when the activists were children, promoted their SPD (Watts et al., 2003). Parents may also communicate the importance of voting or knowledge about current events (i.e., traditional political attitudes and behaviors) to disrupt inequitable social systems (Diemer, 2012).

**Racial Identity**

Racial identity might also inform African American youth's social analysis and sociopolitical action. Early scholars of Black racial identity conceptualized it to be rooted in unique attributes of African American culture and experiences of racial oppression (see Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). The ways that African American adolescents

interpret cultural and institutional factors (e.g., racial oppression) can shape their identity development as well as their psychological and behavioral responses (Spencer, Dupree, & Hartmann, 1997). Although having a strong cultural connection to one's racial group is a vital component of African Americans' SPD (Watts et al., 2003), the process by which racial identity contributes to aspects of SPD has not been identified clearly nor included in models of SPD. One possibility is that African American youth who believe race is central to their self-definition (i.e., have high racial centrality) might be more likely to interpret their experiences through a racial lens. For instance, in one study, African American college students with higher racial centrality were more likely to report experiencing racial discrimination (Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

Racial discrimination and racial socialization can serve as *encounters or a racial awakening* that trigger African American youth to explore the historical legacy of their racial group as well as the meaning and significance of their racial identity (Neville & Cross, 2017). For example, in a longitudinal study of African American adolescents, youth who had experienced discrimination believed more strongly a year later that African Americans are perceived negatively by society (Seaton, Yip, & Sellers, 2009). Black adults' experiences of direct or vicarious racial discrimination, as well as formal and informal education about Black history, have been identified as racial awakening (Neville & Cross, 2017). These racial awakenings may serve as the foundation of social analysis and action. Racial identity can influence how youth understand and are affected by discrimination also. For example, African American youth who believed that others viewed African Americans negatively reported experiencing more racial discrimination but were also affected less negatively by those experiences (Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006). These studies suggest that

becoming aware of society's views of African Americans might allow youth to identify and cope with experiences of racial discrimination more effectively.

Aspects of racial identity may predict individuals' sociopolitical attitudes (Shockley, Wynn, & Ashburn-Nardo, 2016) and behaviors (Lozada et al., 2017). For instance, African American undergraduates who considered race central to their self-concept and believed African Americans should remain a distinct cultural/political group were less likely to believe that the United States was fair and just (Shockley et al., 2016). In another study, dimensions of African American college youth's racial identity predicted their sociopolitical beliefs: participants for whom race was central to their self-concept and who felt positively about being African American were more likely to engage in sociopolitical action and believe that other African American people should do so (White-Johnson, 2012).

In summary, we argue that in the context of systematic racism, an interplay among experiences of racial discrimination, racial socialization, and racial identity shapes African American youth's SPD (see Figure 2-1). Experiences of racial discrimination can prompt African American youth to critically analyze social inequality and engage in sociopolitical action. However, their racial identity and exposure to racial socialization messages may influence how they understand racial discrimination and respond to it. African American youth may draw on their racial identity and their experiences of racial socialization to develop a critical social analysis of oppression and engage in sociopolitical action that addresses individual and structural inequality.

## Considerations for Black Youth Globally

We have contextualized our findings in African American youth's experiences, but sociocultural experiences are likely to influence marginalized youth of other backgrounds and

from other nations where racial stratification persists. Black adults in nations such as Australia, Bermuda, and South Africa describe racial awakenings similar to Black adults in the United States (Neville & Cross, 2017). These awakenings prompted identity development, social analysis, and engagement in activism. In addition, many factors might influence the types of racialized experiences Black youth have and how they understand these experiences. Next, we discuss several examples.

**Social Identities and Cultural Variation**

This study focused on race; however, taking an intersectional approach can allow scholars to deconstruct the ways social identities take meaning in relation to other social identities (Shields, 2008). SPD is developed when "the individual is able to integrate experience in different power relationships into a multileveled understanding of oppression" (Watts et al., 1999, p. 258). The extent to which Black youth are privileged and oppressed in dimensions of their identity (e.g., gender, sexual orientation) can shape how they make meaning of racial experiences and of other systems of oppression (e.g., sexism, homophobia) (Diemer et al., 2016; Watts et al., 1999).

Cultural context might also introduce variation in youth's SPD. In the United States, there are differences in sociocultural experiences of Black immigrant youth from the Caribbean and African nations and African Americans who have a generational legacy in the United States (Thelamour & Johnson, 2017). For Black immigrant youth, developing a connection to a collective Black identity and becoming acculturated to Black American culture may be important to their SPD. In other nations, Black youth with different sociocultural backgrounds (e.g., ethnicity, country of origin) may differ in SPD.

### Cross-Racial Camaraderie and Globalization

Black youth's ability to recognize similarities in the oppression of other racially marginalized groups may enhance their understanding of systematic racism (Lozada et al., 2017). This awareness might allow them to engage in more sociopolitical action that disrupts racial oppression for all racially marginalized groups (Lozada et al., 2017). Similarly, globalization can contribute to international sociocultural experiences. For example, Black Lives Matter protests have emerged internationally in African and European nations (Winsor, 2016). It is possible that Black youth can examine the sociopolitical forces that impact racially marginalized youth, domestically and internationally, and develop camaraderie with other youth.

## Looking Ahead

Investigations of SPD and similar processes (e.g., critical consciousness) explicate the nature of consciousness building and its implications for youth's broader development (e.g., Diemer et al., 2016). However, for racially marginalized youth, scholars should consider the significance of race to their SPD. Our conceptual model provides a start to identify sociocultural influences (e.g., racial discrimination, racial identity, and racial socialization) on African American youth's SPD. However, previous work has found differences in the sociocultural experiences (e.g., racial socialization) of other racially marginalized youth (e.g., Hughes et al., 2008). Thus, researchers should examine the unique attributes of the SPD of different racially marginalized youth (e.g., Latinx, Asian, Native American).

We discuss sociocultural factors as predictors of social analysis and sociopolitical action. However, developing a critical awareness about race (Tatum, 1992) and engaging in activism can inform racial identity development (Neville & Cross, 2017). Given that SPD is a transactional process, social analysis and action may inform how youth interpret their

experiences of racism and racial socialization. Researchers should examine the interconnections between sociocultural factors and SPD. Scholars can investigate how youth use their racial identity, as well as their experiences of discrimination and racial socialization, to inform their analysis of racial inequality and engagement in activism. Scholars should also examine the relations between the proposed model cross-sectionally and longitudinally to elucidate the directionality between factors.

Our work has important implications for scholars and practitioners who investigate the resiliency and healthy psychological development of marginalized youth. A well-established literature has addressed the sociocultural processes that shape marginalized youth's development (see Hughes et al., 2006; Neblett et al., 2012), but this work has not contextualized these processes in SPD. Racial identity and racial socialization have been identified as protective factors that have allowed youth to be resilient amid racial discrimination (Neblett et al., 2012). Examining marginalized youth's SPD gives scholars an opportunity to analyze how youth are resilient in the presence of structural inequality but also how they are empowered to actively resist against and dismantle systems of oppression that impede their development.

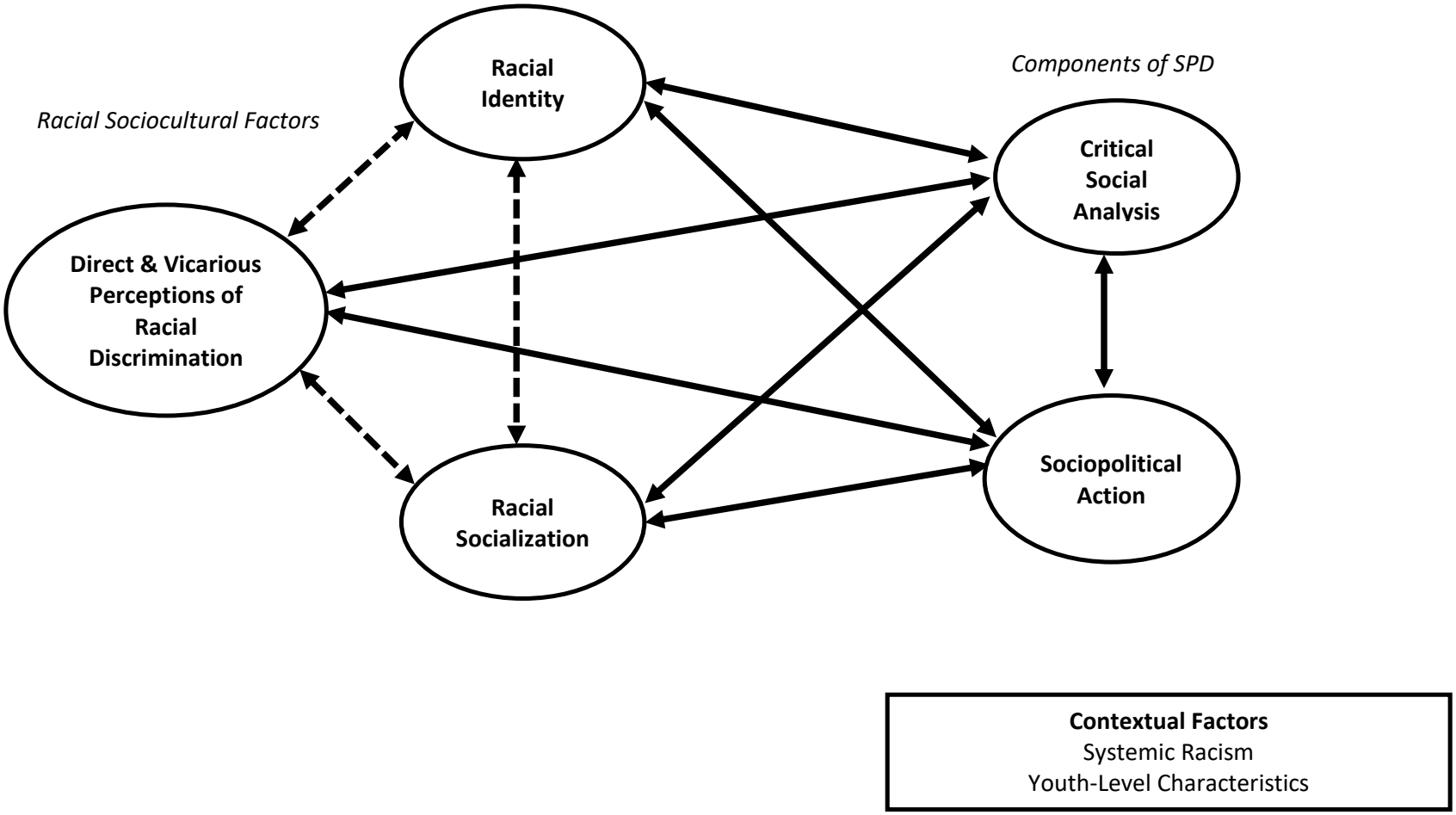


*Figure 2-1*

Conceptual integrative model of the racial sociocultural influences on sociopolitical development

## Chapter 3: Study Two #Icantbreathe: Racial Discrimination, Sociopolitical Action, and Black Youth's Mental Health

*"To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious, is to be in a rage almost all the time…the first problem is how to control that rage so that it won't destroy you. Part of the rage is this: it isn't only what is happening to you, but it's what's happening all around you all the time…."*

(Baldwin et al., 1961)

In the quote above from an interview in 1961, critically acclaimed author and activist James Baldwin discusses the psychological distress that Black Americans experience due to systemic racism. Baldwin describes that the source of distress is not only direct experiences with racial bias but also observed racial bias. Over 50 years after Baldwin's interview, his words remain relevant for Black Americans, including children. Most Black youth (79%- 94%) report experiencing racial discrimination within the past year (Burt & Simons, 2015; Guthrie, Young, Williams, Boyd, & Kintner, 2002; Seaton et al., 2010; Sellers et al., 2006). Black youth may also experience vicarious racial discrimination, which includes direct observations or reports of racially biased experiences that happen to friends, families, or strangers (Harrell, 2000). Racially discriminatory experiences have been consistently found to be associated with poor psychological outcomes for adolescents (see Priest et al., 2013, for review).

In addition to discussing the implications of racism on the Black psyche, Baldwin discusses the need for Black people to develop strategies to negotiate the distress caused by racial discrimination to prevent it from contributing to detrimental outcomes. Sociopolitical action may be one method by which Black youth respond to racial discrimination. Sociopolitical

action refers to the individual or collective action to address societal issues and promote social justice (Watts et al., 2011). Black youth have been found to engage in sociopolitical action using traditional methods (e.g., protest, attending political meetings or rallies, and sit-in) (Hope & Jagers, 2014; Hope et al., 2016) as well as online (e.g., sharing political videos, using social media, blogging) (Harp, Bachmann, Rosas-Moreno, & Loke, 2010; Hope et al., 2016). Furthermore, studies have found Black youth have higher participation in sociopolitical action in comparison to their White, Asian American, and Latino peers (Cohen et al., 2012; Harp et al., 2010; Hope et al., 2016).

Scholars speculate that Black youth's engagement in sociopolitical action can be a mechanism for them to cope with racism by actively addressing issues that impact them and their community (Hope & Spencer, 2017). However, limited work has empirically examined the implications of Black youth's sociopolitical action on their mental health. This study will examine whether Black youth's experiences of discrimination are associated with their engagement in sociopolitical action and whether their sociopolitical action is protective against the negative impact of racial discrimination on their psychological adjustment.

## Racial Discrimination and Black Youth's Mental Health

Racism is a system of oppression that can manifest structurally through policies and cultural values as well as interpersonally through behaviors and attitudes exhibited by individuals (Jones, 1997a). Racial discrimination is the way that racism manifests in an interpersonal context through direct experiences (e.g., being followed in a store or harassed by police officers) as well as through vicarious experiences (e.g., hearing about or witnessing racism experienced by friends, family, or strangers) (Harrell, 2000). Experiences of racial discrimination can contribute to cumulative stressors that hinder the psychological well-being of Black Americans (Clark,

Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Harrell, 2000). There is a well-documented relationship between Black youth's experiences of racial discrimination and several adverse mental health outcomes. Studies have found Black youth's experiences of racial discrimination to be associated with internalizing symptoms, such as lower self-esteem (Lanier, Sommers, Fletcher, Sutton, & Roberts, 2017; Seaton et al., 2010), anxiety (Gaylord-Harden & Cunningham, 2009; Neblett, Bernard, & Banks, 2016) and depression (Lanier et al., 2017; Smith-Bynum, Lambert, English, & Ialongo, 2014). For example, English, Lambert, and Ialongo (2014) conducted a longitudinal examination of the associations between Black youth's experiences of racial discrimination and their depressive symptoms. Black youth's experiences of racial discrimination were associated with higher symptoms of depression a year later across four years (7th grade through 10th grade),

Much of the work examining Black youth's experiences of racial discrimination has focused on direct experiences. Racial discrimination can also occur vicariously through witnessing and hearing about racially marginalizing experiences by friends, families, or others (Harrell, 2000). For example, 71% of Black youth in Tynes, Giang, Williams, and Thompson's (2008) study reported experiencing racism vicariously through the internet, which included seeing a racist image, racist jokes, and seeing untrue or rude things about their ethnic group. Further, in a qualitative study examining Black adolescent males' experiences with police, Brunson (2007) found that in addition to Black adolescent males experiencing direct harassment from police, more than 90% of them knew someone who had been harassed or mistreated. Limited work has examined the psychological implications of vicarious racial discrimination. However, scholars have speculated that like direct experiences, vicarious racial discrimination can be detrimental to the well-being of Black Americans (Helms, Nicolas, & Green, 2010; Harrell, 2000). Furthermore, Heard-Garris, Cale, Camaj, Hamati, and Dominguez (2017)

conducted a review of the limited work examining the implications of vicarious racial discrimination for children domestically and internationally. Across multiple studies, vicarious racial discrimination was associated with externalizing behaviors and internalizing symptoms in children.

In summary, there is well-documented literature linking Black youth's experiences of racial discrimination to adverse psychological health outcomes. While this literature is important in considering the impact of discrimination on Black youth, what is less known is how Black youth respond to their experiences of racial discrimination. The ways in which Black youth respond to their experience of racial discrimination may have implications for the impact that racial discrimination has on their mental health. One possible response to racial discrimination may be engaging in sociopolitical action to address racial injustice.

## Sociopolitical Action

Sociopolitical action involves resistance with the goal of societal change (e.g., contesting unjust policies and practices) and transformation of society (e.g., developing programs or institutions that reflect alternative perspectives to the mainstream culture) (Watts et al., 2003). In a traditional sense, sociopolitical action includes participation in protests, signing petitions, attending rallies, creating initiatives, and joining political advocacy groups. For young people, these types of actions often occur in response to school and community issues (e.g., school resources, environmental justice, drugs, gentrification) (Checkoway, 2011). In addition to participating in action in public spaces, young people can also participate in a sociopolitical action online through digital platforms. Online sociopolitical action includes joining policy advocacy groups online, sharing social or political news on social media, creating social or

political content, and organizing around political issues online (Cohen et al., 2012; Valenzuela, 2013).

**Experiences of Racial Discrimination and Sociopolitical Action**

A majority (75%) of Black youth are engaged in some form of political behavior both traditionally and online (Cohen et al., 2012). Black youth's engagement in sociopolitical action is often focused on issues pertaining to social inequality and racial justice. For example, 65% of Black youth in a recent study reported being involved in sociopolitical action in the Black Lives Matter movement (Hope et al., 2016). Black youth's direct or vicarious experiences of racial discrimination may be a motivation for their engagement in sociopolitical action targeted at racial justice.

Racial discrimination can serve as a racial awakening or encounter that can prompt Black youth's exploration of their identity (Neville & Cross, 2017). Through the process of exploring their identity and reflecting on their discriminatory experiences, Black youth may become aware of racial inequality in broader society and be motivated to take sociopolitical action to address racism (Anyiwo et al., 2018a). Recent studies have found links between Black youth's experiences of racial discrimination and engagement in sociopolitical action. For example, in a sample of Black adolescents and emerging adults, Hope and Jagers (2014) found that Black youth's perceptions of institutional racial discrimination–such as the belief that racism causes Black youth to receive poorer quality education– was associated with more sociopolitical action. While examining sociopolitical action to address racial issues, White-Johnson (2012) found that Black college students' direct experiences of racial discrimination were positively associated with sociopolitical action (e.g., donating money, tutoring Black youth) geared towards positively improving conditions in the Black community.

Black youth's experiences of direct and vicarious racial discrimination may also prompt their engagement in sociopolitical action online. Social media can be used to raise awareness about injustice, reframe discourse, and promote policy changes (Kuo, 2016). Black Americans have used the internet to respond to direct experiences of racial inequality (e.g., racial microaggressions in educational contexts) and critique racial injustice in broader society (e.g., killing of Black Americans in America). For example, the Black Lives Matters movement began as a hashtag on Twitter in response to neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman's acquittal of charges stemming from his racial profiling and murdering of Trayvon Martin – a 17-year-old Black boy (Garza, 2016). Similarly, Eric Garner was an unarmed Black man who was killed by NYPD officers who were using an illegal chokehold. To raise awareness about his death, Black youth used his last words "I can't breathe" on social media and in their protests offline (Kim & Jackson, 2015). After a White fraternity hosted a racially stereotyped themed party, Black students at the University of Michigan started an online hashtag discussion about being Black at the University of Michigan (#BBUM) (Byng, 2013). This hashtag led to movements led by students to address the conditions for Black students. Similarly, Black students at other institutions in America and abroad have used social media to engage in critical discourse about their experiences of marginalization and to raise awareness about racial bias (Andrews & Pauly, 2015). Thus, there is evidence that Black youth are indeed using the internet to raise awareness about the sociopolitical conditions that impact their racial group.

**Sociopolitical Action as a Protective Factor against Racial Discrimination**

Black youth's engagement in sociopolitical action is theorized to be an important factor in their ability to navigate racism (Watts et al., 1999; Watts et al., 2003). Ward (2000) argues that Black youth's healthy psychological resistance against racism allows them to actively cope with

discrimination rather than internalize their experiences. In other words, engagement in sociopolitical action can be a racism-specific coping mechanism, defined by Clark and colleagues (1999) as "cognitions and behaviors used to mitigate the effects of perceived racism" (p.180). Black youth can use sociopolitical action as a behavioral coping method to actively address racially biased structures that contribute to their psychological distress (Hope & Spencer, 2017). Further, engagement in action-oriented towards system change gives young people the agency to transform the institutional policies and practices that impact their community (Anyiwo et al. 2018a; Ginwright & James, 2002; Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012). By engaging in action, Black youth participate in what Ginwright (2010) describes as "radical healing" by promoting their self-determination and ability to exert control over their sociopolitical conditions.

In addition to promoting Black youth's ability to cope with racial discrimination, engagement in sociopolitical action can be beneficial in other aspects of Black youth's development (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012). By participating in action, youth develop a sense of purpose, grow in their emotional faculties, and develop self-confidence (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013; Watts et al., 2003). Black youth can develop connections to culturally enriching contexts where they explore their identities and mobilize with others who have a common struggle (Ginwright, 2007). Furthermore, participation in sociopolitical action can increase youth's access to adult mentors who can provide support to youth as they explore their culture and engage in action (Ginwright, 2007; Kirshner, 2007; Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

Although less examined, Black youth's engagement in online action may be particularly beneficial because it can expand their access to cultural communities and social support networks with racial justice lens (Cohen et al., 2012; Kuo, 2016). If youth are not in communities where they have access to social justice-oriented organization, they can use online action to

develop social ties with like-minded people. Online action can provide historically marginalized people the ability to challenge dominant narratives and drive public discourse around social issues without being restricted by historical gatekeepers (e.g., political parties, news outlets) (Cohen et al., 2012; Koc-Michalska, Lilleker, & Vedel, 2016; Kuo, 2016). For example, Black Lives Matter activists have used social media to drive public dialogue about police killings of Black Americans that may not have been otherwise discussed in mainstream news outlets (Freelon et al., 2016; Schuschke & Tynes, 2016). The use of social media in activism has allowed Black Americans to tell what Yang (2016) calls a "collective story of struggles for racial justice" (p. 15). Online action can also increase youth's agency by giving them opportunities to engage directly with politicians or prominent social figures who are influential in the social issues that are impactful to youth (Cohen et al., 2012).

Although limited work has empirically examined the Black youth's sociopolitical action as a protective factor, studies have found action and factors akin to engagement in action to be directly associated with positive outcomes. For example, in a sample of Black and Latinx high school students, Christens and Peterson (2012) found that sociopolitical control—the belief that one can make an impact in one's community—was negatively correlated with depressive and anxiety symptoms and risk behaviors. Chan et al. (2014) conducted a longitudinal study with Black (93%) and Latino (7%) adolescents and found that sociopolitical action was positively associated with higher life satisfaction and lower arrest rates in early adulthood. In a qualitative study, adolescent activists describe that action facilitates their resiliency and supports their ability to "brush off" negative experiences (Montague & Eiroa-Orosa, 2018). Furthermore, across three studies with college students and activists from across the U.S., Klar and Kasser (2009) found that participation in sociopolitical activism was associated with positive

psychological well-being across multiple indicators of well-being (e.g., life satisfaction, vitality, and social integration).

While many studies have theorized sociopolitical action as being protective, there is some evidence that the impact of sociopolitical action on the well-being of Black youth may be more complex. In a longitudinal study, Hope, Velez, Offidani-Bertrand, Keels, and Durkee, 2018 (2018), found that Black college youth's engagement in sociopolitical action during their freshman year was directly associated with less stress at the end of their freshman year. However, when youth experienced racial microaggressions, engagement in sociopolitical action was associated with higher stress and symptoms of anxiety. This study further highlights the need to examine the implications of Black youth's sociopolitical action more extensively.

It is important to note that many studies examining sociopolitical action use measures that assess participation in activities (e.g., protest and boycotts) but do not capture the issues that motivate the actions (e.g., racism, sexism). It is possible that Black youth must engage in sociopolitical action that specifically focuses on addressing racial issues for their action to be protective against racial discrimination. Furthermore, limited work has examined the implications of youth's sociopolitical action online. Engagement in action online may provide unique benefits (e.g., large social networks, greater access to allies) that may have different protective value than traditional, offline action. The present study seeks to test theories of sociopolitical action as healing for Black youth by examining whether youth's engagement in race-focused online and traditional sociopolitical action is protective against the negative impact of racial discrimination on their mental health.

## Present Study

Racial discrimination has been consistently found to have detrimental impacts on the mental health of Black youth (Gaylord-Harden & Cunningham, 2009; Heard-Garris et al., 2017; Lanier et al., 2017; Neblett et al., 2016). Scholars have theorized that Black youth's engagement in sociopolitical action has the potential to enhance their ability to negotiate racial discrimination and promote their overall psychological well-being (Ginwright, 2010; Ward, 2000; Watts et al., 1999). However, limited empirical work has investigated these theoretical links. The few studies that have examined the psychological implications of Black youth's sociopolitical action have found it to be directly related to positive outcomes (e.g., Chan et al., 2014) but to potentially exacerbate the impact of racial discrimination on mental health (e.g., Hope et al., 2018). Although these studies have provided information about the implications of Black youth's broad engagement in sociopolitical action (e.g., protest behaviors), they do not specifically examine the target of Black youth's sociopolitical action (e.g., racism). Black youth's racial justice action may have unique impacts on psychological well-being. Thus, there is a need to examine further the role of racial discrimination in promoting youth's racial justice sociopolitical action and the potential of sociopolitical action as a protective factor against the adverse impact of racial discrimination on mental health.

To address these gaps in the literature, this study has two goals. The first goal is to examine whether Black youth's experiences with racial discrimination promote their engagement in sociopolitical action targeted at racial justice. In line with this goal, I investigate the following research question:

$R_1$: Is the frequency of Black youth's direct and vicarious experiences of racial discrimination associated with their sociopolitical action?

Consistent with the sociocultural framework of sociopolitical development (Anyiwo et al., 2018a), I offer the following hypothesis:

*$H_1$: Youth who experience more racial discrimination (direct and vicarious) will report higher engagement in race-focused sociopolitical action (traditional and online).*

The second goal of this study is to investigate racial justice sociopolitical action as a protective factor against the negative impact of racial discrimination on mental health. In line with this goal, I investigate the following research question:

$R_2$: Is sociopolitical action associated with anxiety and depressive symptoms?

$R_3$: Does sociopolitical action moderate the association between experiences of racial discrimination and youth's anxiety and depressive symptoms?

Scholars have theorized that Black youth's engagement in sociopolitical action to address racism has the potential to enhance their ability to negotiate racial discrimination and promote their overall psychological well-being (Ginwright, 2010; Hope & Spencer, 2017; Ward, 2000; Watts et al., 1999). Thus, I offer the following hypotheses:

*$H_2$: Sociopolitical action will be inversely associated with depressive and anxiety symptoms.*

*$H_3$: Youth who engage in more sociopolitical action will be buffered from the negative impact of racial discrimination on mental health outcomes (e.g., depression and anxiety symptoms).*

## Methods

### Participants

Participants included 500 adolescents ages 13-17 ($M$ = 14.97, $SD$ = 1.46) all of whom self-identified as Black. A majority of participants identified as female (61.8%) or male (37.3%).

A small minority of participants identified their gender as transgender, non-binary, or other (0.08%). With regard to ethnicity, participants primarily identified as African American (88.2%), followed by Caribbean American (3.6 %), Afro-Latino (2.8%) African (2.2%), Multicultural (2.8%), and other (0.4% ). Adolescents were recruited across the United States with a majority being in the South (58.6%), followed by the Midwest (17.3%), Northeast (16.0%), and West (8.1%). A little over a third of participants described living in an urban context (37.3%), another third lived in suburban areas (35.1%), and a final third lived in rural context (27.6%). Guardian's education was used as a proxy for socioeconomic status. On average, youth reported that their guardian or guardians had attended "some college". Descriptive statistics for demographics are presented in Table 3-1.

**Procedure**

Participants in this study were recruited in 2018 for approximately two months using an online survey panel platform. With the approval of the Institutional Review Board, I established a partnership with Qualtrics survey panel, which hosts surveys and recruits participants from across the United States using a variety of methods (e.g., actively managed market research panels, social media, and specialized recruitment campaigns). Parents who identified as Black and indicated that they had an adolescent child were sent an email inviting their child to participate in the study and alerting them to incentives. Adolescents who received parental consent and who assented to complete the survey were compensated through Qualtrics with various types of awards (e.g., cash, gift cards, redeemable points, and vouchers). The survey was 30 minutes long and included questions about the demographics of participants (e.g., age, ethnic identification, beliefs about SES of family, family composition) and a variety of measures on participants' racialized experiences and beliefs, their engagement in their community, their

media usage, and their mental health outcomes. Three attention checks were included in the survey to ensure data quality. Participants who missed two or more attention checks were screened out of the survey. The survey was randomized for each participant to prevent any bias associated with the question order. For this study, I used measures assessing mental health, traditional and offline sociopolitical action, and experiences of direct and vicarious racial discrimination.

## Measures

**Racial Discrimination.** To measure direct experiences of racial discrimination, I used the Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (ADDI; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000). The scale consists of 15 items used to assess experience of racial discrimination in institutional contexts (e.g., harassment in stores or from police), educational contexts (e.g., lower academic expectations), and from peers (e.g., being socially excluded). Participants were prompted to indicate how frequently they experienced discriminatory incidents because of their race in the last year on a 5-point Likert-type scale (from *never* to *very frequently)*. Sample items include, "You were hassled by a store clerk or store guard" and "You were discouraged from joining an advanced level class." The ADDI was developed and validated in a sample of 177 high school aged adolescents who self-identified as African American, Hispanic, East Asian, South Asian, and non-Hispanic White. Items loaded into three factors: Institutional Discrimination ($\alpha = .72$) (5 items), Educational Discrimination ($\alpha = .60$) (4 items), and Peer Discrimination ($\alpha = .60$) (5 items). In a previous study with Black adolescents, the ADDI subscales were highly correlated (.53 to .88) and the composite score of the scale had good internal consistency ($\alpha = .83$) (Harris-Britt, Valrie, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2007). In the present study, students' scores across all

subscales were compiled to assess the average frequency of direct experiences of racial discrimination ($\alpha$ = .95).

To measure vicarious racial discrimination, I modified items from the adolescent version of the Index of Race-Related Stress (IRRS) (Seaton, 2003; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996), and Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (ADDI; Fisher et al., 2000), and created items based on commonly asked questions on racial discrimination measures. Participants were prompted to respond to 15 items and indicate how frequently they have witnessed or heard about other Black people experiencing racial discrimination. Sample items include, "Threatened with physical violence by a person or group of Whites/non-Blacks" and "Treated with less respect than Whites or non-Blacks at a restaurant." Participants were asked to indicate how frequently they experience vicarious racial discrimination on 5-point Likert-type scale (ranging from *never* to very *frequently*). These items were averaged as a composite to assess the average frequency of vicarious experiences of racial discrimination ($\alpha$ = .97).

**Sociopolitical action.** Traditional sociopolitical action was assessed through the Political Change Action subscale of Anti-Racist Social Action Scale (ARSAS) (Aldana, Bañales, & Richards-Schuster, 2019). The ARSAS scale was developed in partnership with youth to examine the behaviors that youth engage in to address racism in their daily lives. The Political Change Action subscale includes 7 items that reflect youth's protest behaviors and interactions with political officials and media outlets with the goal of challenging racism and promoting diversity. Sample items include, "Called/written/emailed an elected official (i.e. city council, mayor, legislator)" and "Attended a protest on an issue related to race, ethnicity, discrimination and/or segregation." In the original scale, participants reported yes or no to each item to indicate whether they participated in each action in the last year. In this study, I asked participants to

report on a 5-point Likert-type scale (ranging from *never* to *frequently*) to assess how frequently they participated in the behaviors last year (α = .94).

Online sociopolitical action was assessed with 6 adapted items from Kim, Russo, and Amnå's (2016) study on youth online and offline political participation and 2 additional items created for this study. A sample item includes, "Participated in an Internet-Based Protest." The additional items were created to assess participants' engagement in racial social justice hashtag (e.g., #blacklivesmatter, #icantbreathe) and art activism. Participants were asked how frequently they engaged in online political behaviors focused on race in the last year on a 5-point Likert-type scale (ranging from *never* to *frequently*) (α = .94).

**Mental Health.** The short version of the Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (Ebesutani et al., 2012) was used to measure symptoms of anxiety and depression. The anxiety scale includes 11 items used to measure a broad array of symptoms from five prominent anxiety disorders (i.e., separation anxiety disorder, social phobia, generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and panic disorder). The depressive scale consists of 9 items that assess symptoms of major depressive disorder. I omitted the item, "I think about death" because it could be a potential assessment of suicide ideation, which I am not examining in this study (Ebesutani et al., 2012). Participants were given statements that correspond to anxiety and depressive symptomology and were asked to report the frequency that they experienced them on a 4-point scale (from *Never* to *Always*). A sample anxiety symptom item is "I worry that something awful will happen to someone in my family," and a sample depressive symptom item is "I feel sad or empty." The scale was originally validated in a school-based sample of 1,060 children and adolescents (grades 3-12) and a clinically-referred sample of 303 children and adolescents (grades 3-12) in Hawaii. Both samples included youth in grades 3-12 who identified

as multiracial, Asian American, White, African American, and Latino, or other. The study validated a short version of the anxiety subscale that reduced the original 37 item anxiety scale to a 15 items scale. The scale distinguished youth with anxiety disorder diagnosis from youth without a diagnosis but was not statistically different from the original scale. The scale showed good internal consistency in both the clinical and school population (α ranged from .71 to .91). In this study, both the anxiety (α = .93) and depression subscales (α = .93) showed good internal consistency.

**Data Analysis Plan**

The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis in SPSS v25. To address the first research objective, I conducted two regression models: one with online action regressed on racial discrimination and the other with traditional action regressed on racial discrimination. In the first step, the control variables (age, guardian's education, and social media usage) were added. In the second step, the main effects (direct racial discrimination, vicarious racial discrimination) were added.

To address the second research objective, I conducted two regression analyses: one with anxiety symptoms regressed on racial discrimination and sociopolitical action and the other with depressive symptoms regressed on racial discrimination and sociopolitical action. Because previous studies have found negative associations between social media usage and indicators of mental health (e.g., Woods & Scott, 2016), I controlled for average hours of daily social media usage in our analysis. In the first step, the control variables (age, gender, guardian's education, social media usage) were added. In the second step, the main effects (direct racial discrimination, vicarious racial discrimination, online action, and traditional action) were added. In the final model, interactions between discrimination and sociopolitical actions were added (direct racial

discrimination X traditional action, direct discrimination X online action, vicarious racial discrimination X traditional action, vicarious racial discrimination X online action). To control for gender, I dummy coded gender identification with females coded as 1 and males coded as 0. I had insufficient power to control for transgender, non-binary, or other identification due to the small number of youth with these identifications in the sample (N = 6). Thus, for the purpose of these analyses, I omitted youth who identified as transgender, non-binary, or other.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive findings for key study variables are displayed in Table 3-2. The majority of participants (88.3%) reported experiencing some level of direct racial discrimination in the last year. Similarly, 86.6% reported experiencing some level of vicarious racial discrimination. Paired sample t-test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between youth's experience of direct and vicarious racial discrimination ($t(490) = -8.68$, $p < .001$). On average, participants reported slightly higher vicarious racial discrimination than direct racial discrimination describing "sometimes" experiencing vicarious racial discrimination ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.21$) and "rarely" experiencing direct racial discrimination ($M = 2.13$, $SD = 0.99$). With regard to racial justice action, a majority of youth also reported participating in traditional (75.3%) and online action (74.3%) in the past year. However, participants reported "rarely" engaging in both forms of action. Regarding mental health, on average, participants reported "sometimes" experiencing symptoms of anxiety and "sometimes" experiencing symptoms of depression.

Variables with greater than 10% missing data are thought to have a higher likelihood of bias statistical analysis (Bennett, 2001). Missing data on variables ranged from 0% to 2.2 %, well

under the hypothesized threshold. Thus, I used the default deletion method in SPSS in all analyses.

**Preliminary Analysis**

I conducted bivariate correlation analyses on the key study variables. The results are provided in Table 3-3. Age was not associated with youth's reports of racial discrimination, sociopolitical action, and mental health outcomes. There were no gender differences in racial discrimination and sociopolitical action. However, youth who identified as female had higher anxiety than youth who identified as male ($r = .10$, $p \leq .05$). Youth who had guardians with more education reported fewer experiences of direct racial discrimination ($r = -.12$, $p \leq .01$), less online action ($r = -.13$, $p \leq .01$), fewer anxiety symptoms ($r = -.19$, $p \leq .001$), and fewer depressive symptoms ($r = -.21$, $p \leq .001$). Youths' social media usage was positively associated with their reports of direct ($r = .14$, $p \leq .01$) and vicarious racial discrimination ($r = .10$, $p \leq .05$), their participation in traditional action ($r = .13$, $p \leq .01$), and in their symptoms of anxiety ($r = .10$, $p \leq .05$) and depression ($r = .11$, $p \leq .05$).

Direct racial discrimination experience was positively associated with reports of vicarious racial discrimination ($r = .44$, $p \leq .001$), traditional action ($r = .55$, $p \leq .001$), and online action ($r = .56$, $p \leq .001$). Vicarious racial discrimination was also positively associated with traditional ($r = .28$, $p \leq .001$) and online action ($r = .33$, $p \leq .001$). Participating in more traditional action was related to higher symptoms of anxiety ($r = .35$, $p \leq .001$) and depression ($r = .33$, $p \leq .001$). Online action was also positively association to symptoms of anxiety ($r = .42$, $p \leq .001$) and depression ($r = .40$, $p \leq .001$).

A series of one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess differences in key study variables by region. The findings revealed that there were statistically significant regional differences in

the frequency of youth experiences of direct racial discrimination, $F(12.99, 390.26) = 4.837$, $p < .01$. Tukey post hoc analysis found that youth in the Northeast ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 1.04$) and the Midwest ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 0.97$) reported experiencing more direct discrimination than youth in the South ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 0.93$). There were not statistically significant regional differences in experiences of vicarious racial discrimination or in traditional and online action. With regard to mental health symptoms, there were not statistically significant regional differences in anxiety symptoms. There was a violation in the assumption of homogeneity of variance for depressive symptoms as indicated by the Levene's test for equality of variance ($p < .01$). Thus, a one-way Welch ANOVA was conducted to assess regional differences in depressive symptoms. The findings revealed a statistically significant difference in depressive symptoms (Welch's $F(3, 110.076) = 3.64$, $p < .05$). Games-Howell post hoc analysis found that participants in the Northeast ($M = 1.97$, $SD = 0.84$) had higher depressive symptoms participants in the South ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 0.67$).

## Primary Analyses

**Racial Discrimination Predicting Traditional and Online Sociopolitical Action.** Two hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted to determine whether youth's experiences of direct and vicarious racial discrimination predicted their traditional and online sociopolitical action. Results can be found in Table 3-4.

The hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting traditional sociopolitical action revealed that model one, which included the control variables, was significant ($F(3, 482) = 3.05$, $p < .05$). Youth's average daily social media usage was positively associated with racial justice-focused traditional sociopolitical action ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$). However, age and guardians' average education level were not associated. The addition of the main effects in model two contributed to

a significant increase of 29% in variation explained in traditional action ($R^2$ change = .29, $p <$ .001). Youth's direct experiences of racial discrimination were positively associated with their engagement in traditional sociopolitical action ($\beta$ = .52, $p <$.001). However, their vicarious experiences of racial discrimination were not associated with their traditional sociopolitical action.

The hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting online sociopolitical action revealed that model one was significant (F (3, 484) = 3.845. $p <$.05). Guardians' education was negatively associated with youth's online sociopolitical action ($\beta$ = -.13, $p <$ .01). Daily social media usage and age were not associated. The addition of the main effects in model two contributed to a 30% increase in variation explained in online action ($R^2$ change = .30, $p <$ .001). Both youth's direct experience of racial discrimination ($\beta$ = .51, $p <$.001) and their vicarious experiences ($\beta$ = .10, $p <$.05) were positively associated with engagement in online sociopolitical action. However, direct experiences of racial discrimination had a larger effect.

**Racial Discrimination and Sociopolitical Predicting Mental Health Symptoms.** The results for the regressions of racial discrimination and sociopolitical action predicting symptoms of anxiety and depression can be found in Table 3-5.

Hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis revealed that model one was a significant predictor of anxiety symptoms ($F$(4, 474) = 4.52, $p <$ .01). Youth who identified as female had higher symptoms of anxiety than youth who identified as male ($\beta$ = .09, $p <$.05). The guardian's education was negatively associated with symptoms of anxiety ($\beta$ = -.12, $p <$.01). Daily social media usage was positively associated with anxiety symptoms ($\beta$ = .10, $p <$.05). Age was not a significant predictor of anxiety. The addition of the main effects in model 2 resulted in a 27% increase in the variance explained in anxiety symptoms ($R^2$ change = .27, $p <$ .001). Youth's

experiences of direct racial discrimination ($\beta$ = .39, $p$ <.001) and engagement in online sociopolitical action ($\beta$ = .19, $p$ <.01) were positively associated with anxiety symptoms. However, their experiences of vicarious racial discrimination and engagement in traditional sociopolitical action were not associated.

The final model, which included the interactions between discrimination and action, resulted in a 2 % increase in the variance explained in anxiety symptoms ($R^2$ change = .02, $p$ < .05). The interaction between vicarious racial discrimination and online action was the only statistically significant predictor of anxiety ($\beta$ = .16, $p$ <.05). A simple slopes analysis revealed that at low and moderate levels of online sociopolitical action, there was not a significant relation between the vicarious racial discrimination and symptoms of anxiety. However, at high levels of online action, youth who experienced more vicarious racial discrimination had higher symptoms of anxiety ($\beta$ = .10, $p$ <.01). See Figure 3-1 for the graph of simple slopes analysis.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed that model one was a significant predictor of depressive symptoms (F (4, 474) = 5.711. $p$ <.001). The guardian's education was negatively associated with symptoms of depression ($\beta$ = -.14, $p$ <.01). Daily social media usage was positively associated with depression symptoms *(*$\beta$ = .12, $p$ <.01). However, age and gender were not significant predictors of depressive symptoms. The addition of the main effects in model 2 resulted in a 24.4% increase in the variance explained in depressive symptoms ($R^2$ change = .244, $p$ < .001). Youth's experiences of direct racial discrimination ($\beta$ = .37, $p$ <.001) and engagement in online sociopolitical action ($\beta$ = .19, $p$ <.01) were positively associated with depressive symptoms. However, youth's experiences of vicarious racial discrimination and engagement in traditional sociopolitical action were not associated with depressive symptoms.

The final model, which included the interactions between discrimination and action, resulted in a 3% increase in the variance explained in depressive symptoms ($R^2$ change = .030, $p$ < .001). The interaction between vicarious racial discrimination and online action was the only statistically significant predictor of depressive symptoms ($\beta$ = .20, $p$ <.01). A simple slopes analysis revealed that at low levels of online sociopolitical action, there was not a significant relation between the vicarious racial discrimination and symptoms of depression. At moderate levels of online action, there was a positive relation between vicarious racial discrimination and depressive symptoms such that youth who experienced more vicarious racial discrimination had higher symptoms of depression ($\beta$ = .05, $p$ <.05). At high levels of online action, the relation between online action and depressive symptoms was also significant and had a stronger effect ($\beta$ = .14, $p$ <.001). See Figure 3-2 for the graph of simple slopes analysis.

## Discussion

Racism is an omnipresent force that shapes the everyday lives of Black people in America. Research has highlighted that racism can have devastating impacts on Black youth's well-being (see Priest et al., 2013). However, despite being targets of racial discrimination in schools and in their communities, Black youth have and continue to be engaged in action to combat and dismantle racism. Scholars have conceptualized youth's sociopolitical action as a mechanism by which youth cope with and heal from the interpersonal and structural manifestations of racism (Ginwright, 2010; Hope & Spencer, 2017; Ward, 2000). However, limited empirical work has investigated the implications of Black youth's race-focused sociopolitical action. This study sought to address gaps in the literature by examining: 1) whether youth's experiences of racial discrimination can prompt their race-focused sociopolitical action

and 2) the implications of Black youth's racial justice sociopolitical action on their mental health.

**Racial Discrimination and Racial Justice-Grounded Sociopolitical Action**

Scholars argue that youth's experiences of racial discrimination can alert them to or reinforce their awareness of racial inequality in society thereby motivating them into sociopolitical action (Anyiwo et al., 2018a). Accordingly, I anticipated that Black youth who experienced more racial discrimination would report higher engagement in racial justice sociopolitical action. This hypothesis was partially supported. Youth who reported more direct experiences of racial discrimination in the last year had higher participation in traditional and online action to address racism. This finding falls in line with other studies that have found links between youth's experiences of racial discrimination and their sociopolitical and civic action (Hope & Jagers, 2014; White-Johnson, 2012). However, a unique contribution of this study is that unlike other studies, my findings specifically highlight racial discrimination as a sociocultural experience that prompts youth to address race-specific issues in their communities and in *online* platforms. As described in previous work, youth's direct experiences of racial discrimination may operate as a racial "awakening" for Black youth that stimulates their exploration of race thus increasing their awareness of racism as a systemic issue that needs to be addressed through sociopolitical action (Neville & Cross, 2017).

Contrary to predictions, vicarious racial discrimination was not related to traditional sociopolitical action (e.g., protest, boycotts, and calling legislators) in my regression analyses. This finding was unanticipated, particularly given that highly publicized deaths of Black youth and adults at the hand of police and civilians was the catalyst for Black Lives Matters movement and have been met with massive protest across the country (Garza, 2016; Williamson, Trump, &

Einstein, 2018). Indeed, a majority of youth in our study reported witnessing or hearing about other Black people being harassed (64.8%) or killed by police (60.2%). These experiences were among the highest reported types of vicarious racial discrimination. The null finding with vicarious racial discrimination may be related to the strong effect of direct racial discrimination on traditional sociopolitical action. While vicarious racial discrimination was positively correlated with traditional action in bivariate analysis, when taking into account direct experiences in regression analysis, this association was no longer significant. Vicarious racial discrimination, however, was positively associated with youth's online activism. Given that there has been immense public discourse around racial issues on digital platforms, youth may experience and concurrently respond to vicarious forms of racial discrimination online.

In general, the findings of our analysis suggest that direct racial discrimination was more impactful on youth's sociopolitical action than vicarious racial discrimination. Direct racial discrimination was associated with both types of sociopolitical action and had a stronger effect on youth's online activism than their experiences of vicarious discrimination. The stronger impact of direct racial discrimination on youth's sociopolitical action may be related to youth's mental health outcomes. Consistent with other research, in this study, youth's direct experiences of racial discrimination were positively associated with depressive and anxiety symptoms. However, when taking into account direct experiences, youth's vicarious racial discrimination was not associated with mental health symptoms. The psychological toll of youth's direct experiences of racial discrimination may foster a desire for youth to actively cope with racial discrimination using sociopolitical action.

**Racial Discrimination, Sociopolitical Action, and Mental Health**

The second goal of our study was to investigate the potential of sociopolitical action as a protective mechanism for Black youth. Youth activism has been conceptualized theoretically as a context for Black youth's positive development and healing from racial oppression (Ginwright, 2010; Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012; Watts et al., 2003). However, in this study, there were no associations between youth's traditional sociopolitical action and mental health symptoms. Further, there was a negative association between youth's online sociopolitical action and their mental health symptoms such that youth who engaged in more race-focused sociopolitical action online reported higher symptoms of anxiety and depression. This finding was further qualified with a significant interaction between vicarious racial discrimination and online action. Vicarious racial discrimination was associated with more anxiety and depressive symptoms but only for youth who engaged in moderate to high online sociopolitical action.

These findings suggest that sociopolitical action, particularly action online, may be a source of stress for Black youth that can exacerbate the impact of vicarious racial discrimination on mental health outcomes. These findings reinforce the work of Hope and colleagues (2018) that found that Black college youth's activism exacerbated the associations between racial microaggressions and youth's stress and anxiety symptoms. In our study, however, these associations only occurred for online action and vicarious racial discrimination. Online action may be related to mental health symptoms due to the potential of increased exposure to race-related issues through the internet. In the online context, youth may increase access to cultural communities that provide them with a large platform to share their views and mobilize around social issues (Cohen et al., 2012; Kuo, 2016; Schuschke & Tynes, 2016). However, youth's access to online platforms can also increase their vulnerability to racial attacks (Tynes, Lozada,

Smith, & Stewart, 2018). Scholars argue that radical groups have contributed to a culture of hate on the internet by using digital technologies to perpetuate White political, cultural, and economic supremacy (Tynes, 2005; Tynes et al., 2018). The growth of spaces for marginalized communities to express social commentary also provides space for hate groups, like White supremacists, to spew racist, biased rhetoric and verbally harass or intimidate others (Tynes, 2005). Indeed, Black youth have been found to be at risk for multiple forms of racial discrimination online (Tynes et al., 2018). Black youth who are actively advocating for racial justice online may be more exposed to groups who adamantly oppose the sociopolitical power and liberation of Black communities and may be more susceptible to racial attacks from such hate groups.

**Limitations**

The findings of this study provide great insight into the associations between Black youth's experiences of racial discrimination, their sociopolitical action, and their mental health. It should be noted, however, that the data are cross-sectional, which provides limited awareness to the directionality of the found associations. My findings showed a similar trend to the findings of Hope and colleagues' (2018) longitudinal study with college students, which found that reports of stress and depressive symptoms following incidents of racial discrimination were stronger for youth who were socio-politically active. Therefore, a longitudinal study would be an important next step in order to confirm temporal associations between discrimination, sociopolitical action, and mental health in an adolescent sample. For example, it is possible that youth who are more socio-politically engaged may have increased exposure to racial discrimination or may be more adept at identifying discriminatory events as being rooted in

racism. Similarly, youth with more anxiety or depressive symptoms following incidents of racial discrimination may engage in more sociopolitical action as a mechanism to cope.

Another limitation of the study concerns the measurement of youth's experiences of racial discrimination and sociopolitical action. Youth reported subjective measurement of *never* to *very frequently* on how often they experience racial discrimination or engage in sociopolitical action. This type of scaling provides great insight into youth's subjective perspectives with regard to the frequency of their discrimination and sociopolitical action but does not provide a numeric assessment of frequency. Participants' perceived frequency often does not map on to their numerical frequency (Woltz, Gardner, Kircher, & Burrow-Sanchez, 2012). For example, youth in this study spend almost 7 hours daily on social media ($M = 6.75$, $SD = 5.50$). Youth who spend more time on social media may perceive their online sociopolitical action as being infrequent based on the proportion of time that they spend in such action relative to their general social media usage. This means that youth may inflate or deflate their online sociopolitical action. More information about numerical frequency (e.g., daily, a few times a month) that youth engage in action or experience discrimination can provide clarity on what levels of action or discrimination may leave youth vulnerable. This information can inform how interventions are tailored to support youth's well-being.

**Implications and Future Directions**

The findings of this study prompt the need to investigate further the factors that can shape Black youth's sociopolitical action and the implications of their action. For example, although not a major focus of this study, our analysis found that the guardian's education was negatively associated with their online sociopolitical action. Youth with guardians with higher education had lower engagement in online sociopolitical action than youth with guardians that have lower

education. However, there was not a difference in traditional sociopolitical action based on guardian's education. These findings reflect a need to unpack demographic and familial factors that may facilitate youth's sociopolitical action or may be influential in the impact of action on mental health.

Although we found that racial discrimination was associated with youth's sociopolitical action, there is a need to understand what factors may shape those associations. For example, Anyiwo and colleagues (2018a) argue that youth's racial sociocultural experiences (e.g., racial discrimination, racial socialization, and racial identity) are intertwined and can interact to shape their sociopolitical beliefs and action. Indeed, a recent study found that discrimination interacted with identity to shape youth and young adults' orientation towards activism in the Black community (Hope, Gugwor, Riddick, & Pender, 2019). Future work should examine the sociocultural or community factors (e.g., racial socialization, adults' mentorship) that can shape the association between youth's experiences of racial discrimination and their sociopolitical action.

An important next step to this study includes the examination of the trajectory of sociopolitical action, discrimination, and mental health. As youth transition across adolescence and emerge into adulthood, they increase in the types of sociopolitical action they can engage in (e.g., voting, elected positions) and the types of racial discrimination that they may experience (e.g., workplace discrimination). A longitudinal study can provide insight into how discrimination relates to sociopolitical action over time and whether sociopolitical action can have differential effects on youth's mental health over time. A mixed methods approach to this work can use qualitative inquiry to elucidate the extent to which youth draw from their sociocultural experiences to inform their sociopolitical action. Further, through qualitative

inquiry, we can investigate youth's beliefs about how their experiences of discrimination and participation in sociopolitical action influence their mental health.

Finally, future work can examine the broader impact of sociopolitical action on other indicators of Black youth development. Youth's sociopolitical development is thought to stimulate youth's identity exploration, increase community connections, increase their academic engagement, enhance their analytical skills, and support their ability to regulate emotion (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012; Watts et al., 2003). Although sociopolitical action online was associated with higher anxiety and depressive symptoms in this study, it may be possible that action can have positive implications for youth across other metrics of positive youth development. For example, in a longitudinal study, Ballard, Hoyt, and Pachucki (2018) found youth activism to be associated with risky outcomes such as substance use and excessive fast food consumption in adulthood. However, the authors also found activism to be associated with positive outcomes like higher personal earnings and higher educational attainment. These findings suggest that youth activism is likely to have a complex impact on youth's development. Thus, more work is necessary to understand the holistic impact of Black youth's racial sociopolitical development and identify factors that may mitigate potential stressors associated with activism.

## Conclusion

This paper started with a reflection on the words of activist and author James Baldwin who once stated, "*To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious, is to be in a rage almost all the time.*" In line with Baldwin's words, the findings of this study suggest that Black youths' consciousness about racial oppression, as indicated through their engagement in sociopolitical action, contributes to elevated symptoms of depression and anxiety. Youth's

pursuits of equity and social justice may operate as another stressor that Black youth are tasked with navigating as they grow and transition into adulthood. Nevertheless, Black youth live in a nation rooted in systems of racial oppression that operate to limit their educational, vocational, and economic growth across their life span. Sociopolitical development is conceptualized as an "antidote for oppression" not only because of the potential impact on the well-being of youth but also because of its ability to promote collective action that seeks to dismantle systems of oppression and promote liberation (Watts et al., 1999; Watts et al., 2003). Thus, a major task for scholars, social work practitioners, and parents alike is to identify mechanisms to support the well-being of youth as they engage in sociopolitical action to make a change in their communities.

As interventions are designed to promote youth's civic and political engagement, scholars and practitioners should be thoughtful about integrating content in their curriculum that supports youth's ability to cope with the stressors associated with activism, particularly online. Scholars identified that intergenerational relationships can be transformative in youth's ability to address issues in their communities and in society (Ginwright, 2005; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Future work can consider designing interventions that create an infrastructure for adults to mentor and provide emotional support to youth as they participate in activism online.

Table 3-1

*Demographics of Sample*

| Variable | Count | Valid Percentage | Percentage Missing |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Sex* | | | 0.4 |
| Female | 308 | 61.8 | |
| Male | 186 | 37.3 | |
| Transgender, non-binary, or other | 4 | 0.08 | |
| *Age* | | | 0 |
| 13 | 116 | 23.2 | |
| 14 | 84 | 16.8 | |
| 15 | 104 | 20.8 | |
| 16 | 90 | 18.0 | |
| 17 | 106 | 21.2 | |
| *Ethnicity* | | | 0 |
| African American | 441 | 88.2 | |
| Caribbean American | 18 | 3.6 | |
| Afro-Latino | 14 | 2.8 | |
| African | 11 | 2.2 | |
| Multicultural | 14 | 2.8 | |
| Other | 2 | 0.4 | |
| *Region* | | | 11.2 |
| South | 260 | 16.0 | |
| Midwest | 77 | 17.3 | |
| Northeast | 71 | 58.6 | |
| West | 36 | 8.1 | |
| *Locale* | | | 0.8 |
| Urban | 185 | 37.3 | |
| Suburban | 174 | 35.1 | |
| Rural | 137 | 27.6 | |

Table 3-2

*Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Variables*

| Measure | Mean | SD | Minimum | Maximum | Skewness | Kurtosis | Alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Direct Racial Discrimination | 2.13 | 0.99 | 1.00 | 5.00 | .84 | 0.06 | .95 |
| Vicarious Racial Discrimination | 2.59 | 1.21 | 1.00 | 5.00 | .90 | -1.10 | .97 |
| Traditional Sociopolitical Action | 2.07 | 1.11 | 1.00 | 5.00 | .85 | -0.38 | .94 |
| Online Sociopolitical Action | 2.07 | 1.09 | 1.00 | 5.00 | .84 | -0.29 | .94 |
| Anxiety Symptoms | 1.77 | 0.67 | 1.00 | 4.00 | .94 | 0.27 | .93 |
| Depressive Symptoms | 1.79 | 0.72 | 1.00 | 4.00 | .91 | 0.14 | .93 |

Table 3-3

*Pearson Correlations Among Key Study Variables and Control Variables*

| Measure | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Direct Racial Discrimination | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Vicarious Racial Discrimination | **.44*** ** | - | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Traditional Sociopolitical Action | **.55*** ** | **.28*** ** | - | | | | | | | |
| 4. Online Sociopolitical Action | **.56*** ** | **.33*** ** | **.78*** ** | - | | | | | | |
| 5. Anxiety Symptoms | **.53*** ** | **.30*** ** | **.35*** ** | **.42*** ** | - | | | | | |
| 6. Depressive Symptoms | **.51*** ** | **.31*** ** | **.33*** ** | **.40*** ** | **.88*** ** | - | | | | |
| 7. Age | .01 | .00 | .00 | .05 | .01 | .05 | - | | | |
| 8. Sex | -.04 | -.00 | -.03 | -.06 | **.10*** | .08 | -.00 | - | | |
| 9. Guardian's Education | **-.12**** | -.02 | -.06 | **-.13**** | **-.19*** ** | **-.21*** ** | -.03 | -.04 | - | |
| 10. Social Media Usage | **.14**** | **.10*** | **.13**** | .08 | **.10*** | **.11*** | **.11*** | **.11*** | -.02 | - |

*Note.* Sex was coded as 1 for female and 0 for male. Bolded correlations are statistically significant. *$p \leq .05$, **$p \leq .01$, ***, $p \leq .001$

Table 3-4

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Racial Discrimination Predicting Sociopolitical Action*

| | Traditional Sociopolitical Action | | | | Online Sociopolitical Action | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | *B* | *SE B* | *β* | *95% CI* | *B* | *SE B* | *β* | *95% CI* |
| Step 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Age | -0.01 | .04 | -.01 | [-0.08, 0.06] | 0.04 | .03 | .05 | [-0.03, 0.10] |
| Guardian's Education | -0.04 | .03 | -.06 | [-0.11, 0.02] | **-0.09** | **.03** | **-.13** | [-0.16, -0.03] |
| Social Media Usage | **0.03**** | **.01** | **.13** | **[0.01, 0.04]** | 0.02 | .01 | .08 | [0.00, 0.03] |
| $R^2$ | **.02*** | | | | **.03**** | | | |
| Step 2 | | | | | | | | |
| Direct RD Frequency | **0.59***** | **.05** | **.52** | **[0.50, 0.69]** | **0.56***** | **.05** | **.50** | **[0.47, 0.65]** |
| Vicarious RD Frequency | 0.06 | .04 | .06 | [-0.02, 0.13] | **0.10**** | **.04** | **.11** | **[0.03, 0.18]** |
| $R^2$ | **.31***** | | | | **.33***** | | | |
| $R^2\Delta$ | **.29***** | | | | **.31***** | | | |

*Note.* Age, Parent's education, Social media usage, Direct racial discrimination, Vicarious racial discrimination, Values in bold were statistically significant. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, ***, $p \leq .001$

Table 3-5

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Discrimination and Action Predicting Anxiety and Depressive Symptoms*

| | Anxiety Symptoms | | | | Depressive Symptoms | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | *B* | *SE B* | *β* | *95% CI* | *B* | *SE B* | *β* | *95% CI* |
| Step 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Age | -0.01 | .02 | -.02 | [-0.05, 0.03] | 0.01 | .02 | .01 | [-0.04, 0.05] |
| Sex | **0.10*** | .06 | .07 | [-0.02, 0.23] | 0.10 | .07 | .07 | [-0.03, 0.23] |
| Guardian's Education | **-0.08***** | **.02** | **-.17** | **[-0.12, -0.04]** | **-0.09**** | **.02** | **-.20** | **[-0.14, -0.05]** |
| Social Media Usage | **0.02**** | **.01** | **.13** | **[0.00, 0.02]** | **0.02**** | **.01** | **.12** | **[0.00, 0.03]** |
| $R^2$ | **.05***** | | | | **.06***** | | | |
| Step 2 | | | | | | | | |
| Direct Racial Discrimination | **0.27***** | **.03** | **.40** | [0.21, 0.34] | **0.28***** | **.04** | **.38** | **[0.21, 0.36]** |
| Vicarious Racial Discrimination | 0.04 | .02 | .07 | [-0.01, -0.08] | 0.05 | .03 | .09 | [0.00, 0.10] |
| Traditional Action | -0.01 | .04 | -.02 | [-0.09, 0.06] | -0.03 | .04 | -.04 | [-0.11, 0.06] |
| Online Action | **0.10**** | **.04** | **.17** | **[0.02, 0.18]** | **0.11**** | **.04** | **.17** | **[0.03, 0.20]** |
| $R^2$ | **.32***** | | | | **.31***** | | | |
| $R^2\Delta$ | **.27***** | | | | **.25***** | | | |
| Step 3 | | | | | | | | |
| Direct Discrm X Trad Action | -0.04 | .04 | -.09 | [-0.12, 0.04] | -0.04 | .04 | -.09 | [-0.13, 0.04] |
| Direct Discrm X Online Action | 0.01 | .04 | .02 | [-0.07, 0.09] | 0.02 | .04 | .03 | [-0.07, 0.10] |
| Vicarious Discrm X Trad Action | -0.02 | .04 | -.04 | [-0.09, 0.05] | -0.04 | .04 | -.07 | [-0.12, 0.04] |
| Vicarious Discrm X Online Action | **0.08*** | **.04** | **.17** | **[0.01, 0.15]** | **0.12**** | **.04** | **.22** | **[0.04, 0.19]** |
| $R^2$ | **.34***** | | | | **.34***** | | | |
| $R^2\Delta$ | **.02*** | | | | **.03***** | | | |

*Note.* Sex was coded as 1 for female and 0 for male. Age, Parent's education, Social media usage, Direct racial discrimination, Vicarious racial discrimination, Traditional action, and Online Action were centered based on the mean. Values in bold were statistically significant. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, ***, $p \leq .001$

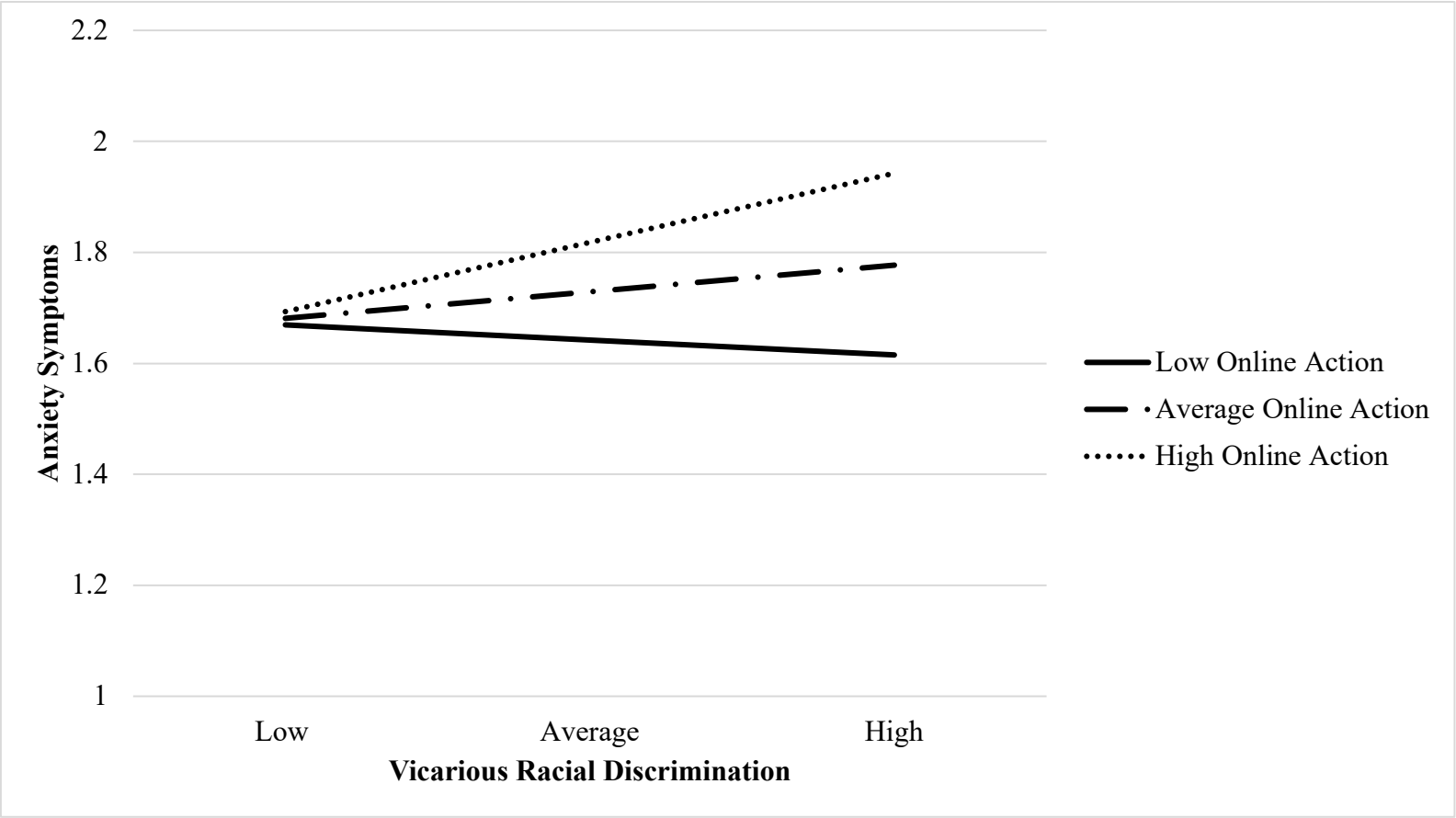


*Figure 3-1*

Depiction of interaction between vicarious racial discrimination and racial justice-focused online sociopolitical action predicting anxiety symptoms.

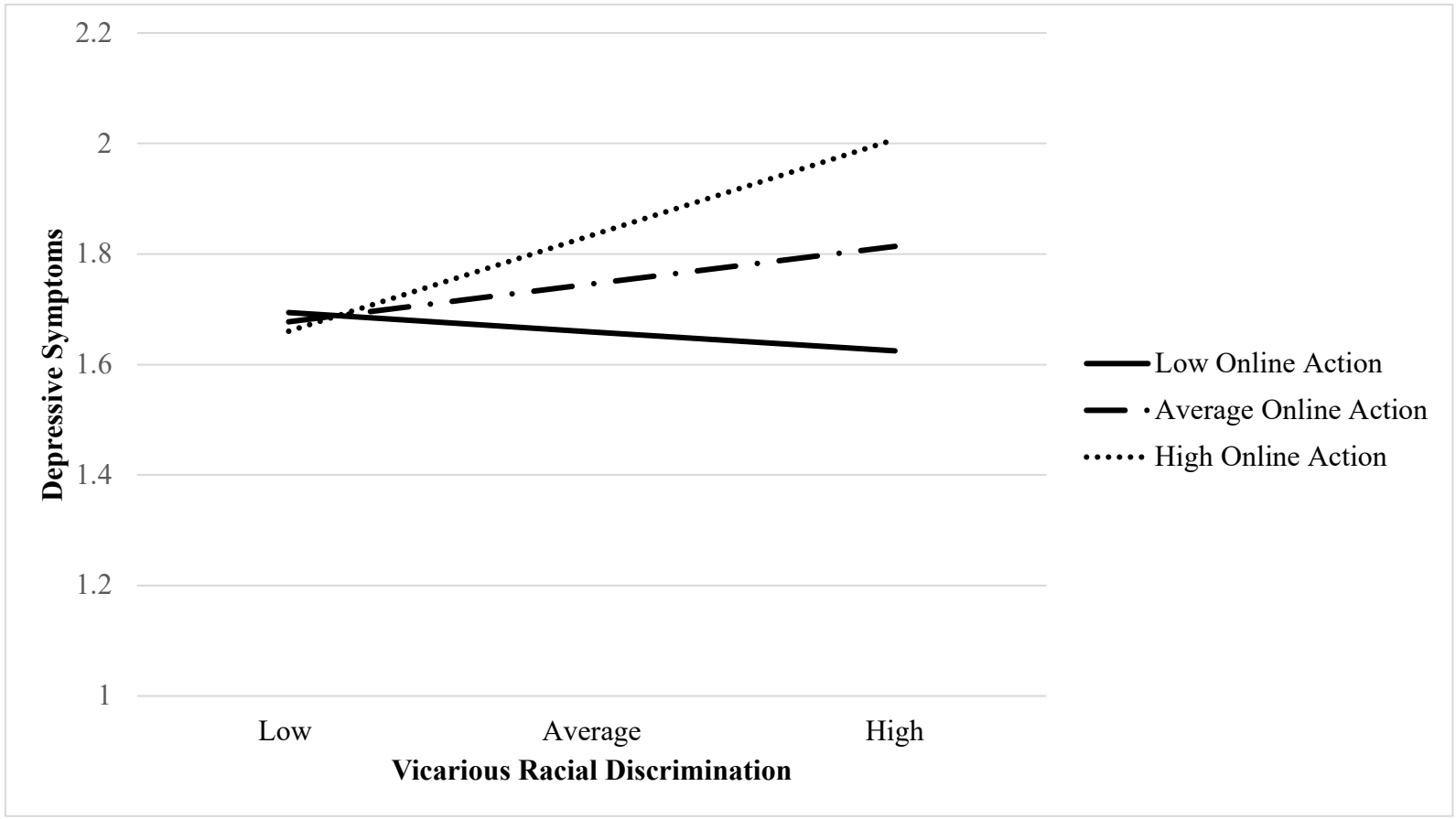


*Figure 3-2*

Depiction of interaction between vicarious racial discrimination and racial justice-focused online sociopolitical action predicting depressive symptoms.

## Chapter 4 Study Three: "They can't take away the light": Examining Hip-Hop in the Empowerment and Sociopolitical Development of Black Youth

*"…Slave master take our names, 5-0 take the shot, and young souls take the blame, man but they can't take away the light"*

Big Sean - The Light

In April of 2015, hundreds of high school students in Baltimore, a majority of whom were Black youth, took to the streets to protest the death of Freddie Gray, a young Black man brutally killed while in the custody of Baltimore City Police. These youths' activism gained national attention that was instrumental in raising awareness about Freddie Gray's unfortunate death while creating pressure to charge the officers involved (Time Staff, 2015). Youth activism in Baltimore was by no means an anomaly. Black youth report being highly involved in racial social justice movements (Hope et al., 2016); through their action, Black youth have addressed a multitude of issues that impact their communities including police harassment and violence (Democracy Now, 2014), school closings (Braswell, 2014), and gun policies (Crunden, 2018). Black youth's racial justice activism has implications for their development in that it can promote their resiliency and can promote community and system change (Anyiwo et al., 2018a; Ginwright, 2010). Thus, identifying the factors that spur and facilitate Black youth activism can be instrumental in supporting their positive psychological development.

In addition to other factors, such as parents, community mentors, peers and social justice curricula (Aldana & Byrd, 2015; Diemer, 2012; Diemer & Li, 2011; Ginwright, 2005; Ladson-

Billings, 1995; Watts & Flanagan, 2007), youth's engagement with media and popular culture has been found to promote their activism (Pasek, Kenski, Romer, & Jamieson, 2006). Hip Hip-is a cultural form that has become ubiquitous in mainstream media and is argued to be highly influential in informing the worldviews and behaviors of youth (Alridge & Stewart, 2005; Bridges, 2011; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011). In fact, educators and scholars have developed pedagogical approaches and interventions to use hip-hop to promote Black youth's cultural knowledge, raise their awareness about sociopolitical conditions (e.g., racism) that impact Black communities, and teach them strategies for social justice (Akom, 2009; Prier & Beachum, 2008; Stovall, 2006). Building upon applied work, the present study uses a strength-based approach to examine how Black youth's engagement with and perceptions of hip-hop in their everyday lives relate to their sociopolitical development (SPD) – the process by which individuals understand and contest the social structures (e.g., cultural ideals and policies) that produce social inequality.

**The Sociopolitical Development of Black Youth**

SPD consists of the development of *social analysis* (the ability to analyze social systems that produce inequality and envision a socially just society) as well as *sociopolitical action* (behaviors aimed at dismantling biased social structures and promoting justice) (Watts et al., 2003). This means that youth's SPD includes the ability to identify and analyze injustice (e.g., understand racial bias school policies) and behaviorally respond to inequality (e.g., participation in protest, sit-ins, or social media campaigns). However, youth's participation in sociopolitical action also requires *agency,* meaning that youth must be motivated into action and believe that

they and their group can make a change (McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016; Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

Sociopolitical development is informed by proximal and distal forces in youth's lives (Watts et al., 2003). The political and racial messages that youth receive from others and the mentorship of social action are important in facilitating their SPD (Anyiwo et al., 2018a; Diemer, 2012; Diemer & Li, 2011; Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Watts et al., 2003). Studies examining the factors promoting SPD have examined the influence of parents, peers, and adult community members (Diemer, 2012; Diemer & Li, 2011; Ginwright, 2007); however, for adolescents, media may also be an important influence on their SPD. During adolescence, youth are actively developing their identity while simultaneously becoming increasingly independent from their parents. Youth engage with the mass media for longer periods than they spend with their parents and in school (Steele & Brown, 1995). Thus, adolescents may be increasingly likely to draw from media to support the development of their cultural, ideological, and societal beliefs (Miranda, Blais-Rochette, Vaugon, Osman, & Arias-Valenzuela, 2015; Rosenblum, Daniolos, Kass, & Martin, 1999). Studies have shown that youth's media use is associated with higher political awareness and sociopolitical action (Lee, Shah, & McLeod, 2013; Pasek et al., 2006). This study examines the role of hip-hop media in promoting components of Black youth's SPD (e.g., agency and sociopolitical action).

**Hip-Hop Culture, Empowerment, and Sociopolitical Themes**

Grounded in the principles of peace, love, unity and having fun, hip-hop culture emerged in the context of vast economic deprivation and racial marginalization resulting in a myriad of challenges impacting Black youth, such as joblessness, drug addiction, declining youth programs, police brutality, and violence (Alridge, 2005; Akom, 2009; Rose, 1994). As historian

Tricia Rose explains, hip-hop "attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutality, truncated opportunity, and oppression with the cultural imperatives of Black and Caribbean history, identity and community'' (1994, p. 21). Hip-hop culture has been described as a "way of life" that reflects elements such as music, dress, aesthetics, and language that are impactful in youth's worldview (Alridge & Stewart, 2005; Bridges, 2011; Prier & Beachum, 2008). Since its onset, hip-hop culture has acted as a form of resistance by allowing Black youth to engage in authentic, unique expressions of self in their communities and to incorporate sociopolitical themes, including the promotion of cultural pride and the critiques of the ramifications of structural oppression (e.g., police brutality, mass incarceration, community violence) (Alridge, 2005; Dyson, 2004; Rose, 1994). The music within hip-hop culture, also known as rap music, has emerged as the most mainstream element of the culture (Alridge & Stewart, 2005; Bridges, 2011; Prier & Beachum, 2008; Rose, 1994). While some scholars and hip-hop artists argue that rap and hip-hop are distinct (Tyson, DuongTran, & Acevedo, 2012; Jones, 1997b), others argue that rap music is rooted in the core elements of hip-hop culture (Rose, 1994). Therefore, for clarity, hereinafter, we use *rap* to describe the music products of hip-hop culture (e.g., rap music and rap music videos), *hip-hop media* to discuss other elements of hip-hop culture reflected in media (e.g., blogs, social media, radio shows), and *hip-hop culture* as an umbrella term for both rap and hip-hop media.

Travis (2013) argues that rap contains content that can promote empowerment, a construct akin to SPD (Christens et al., 2016). Through an analysis of rap lyrics from content analyses and an intervention, Travis (2013) found that rap includes themes that may promote youth's esteem, resilience, and SPD. The sociopolitical and empowering themes in rap music have been influential in inspiring and facilitating sociopolitical action against racial injustice. For

example, rap artists use their music to socially critique the unjust killing of unarmed Black Americans by police (e.g., killing of teenager Michael Brown), promote hope in the resiliency of the Black community, and advocate for social change (Coscarelli, 2015). In hip-hop media, artists and radio hosts use social media and radio to speak out against racial inequality, organize and participate in protests, and facilitate political action (e.g., voting campaign) (Poston, Rocha, Serna, & Mather, 2016). For example, hip-hop radio shows (e.g., The Breakfast Club, Ebro in the Morning) interviewed presidential candidates (e.g. Bernie Sanders, Hilary Clinton) about contentious racial issues and policies that impact marginalized communities (Gutierrez-Morfin, 2016; Rosario, 2016).

Sociopolitical themes, however, by no means reflect the entirety of hip-hop culture. Many rappers remain silent about sociopolitical issues or show opposition to engagement in social justice work (Pearce, 2016). Further, content analyses of rap media (e.g., rap music and videos) have found contemporary rap to contain misogynistic content (e.g., shaming and assault of women) (Armstrong, 2001; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009), promotion of violence (e.g., gun talk, retaliation) (Kubrin, 2005; Jones, 1997b), and promotion of sexual objectification (e.g., sexual gaze, sexually suggestive dancing) (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011). Therefore, hip-hop may include messages that can simultaneously promote sociopolitical and problematic themes (e.g., violence, misogyny, and substance abuse), sometimes in a single song (Travis, 2013; Tyson, 2004). The seemingly divergent themes in rap and hip-hop media reflect the complexity of the Black experience, which includes a legacy of racial and cultural pride and resistance but also reflects the effects of systematic racial oppression (e.g., economic deprivation, violence, and drugs) (Prier & Beachum, 2008; Rose, 1994). Therefore, it is critical to understand how Black youth use and make meaning of hip-hop to elucidate the impact that hip-hop may have on their SPD.

**Black Youth, Hip-Hop Culture and Sociopolitical Development**

Many scholars have proposed that hip-hop culture can facilitate the SPD of Black youth. Akom (2009) argues that hip-hop culture can be used as a "liberatory practice" to analyze sociopolitical conditions of marginalized communities (e.g., Black incarceration, racism, police brutality) and the need for social justice. In the Individual and Collective Empowerment framework (ICE), Travis (2013) argues that rap music promotes youth's individual empowerment, which includes the promotion of youth's esteem, resilience, and growth as well as their collective empowerment (e.g., SPD), which includes youth's racial and cultural pride and engagement in behaviors to promote better conditions for their communities. Indeed, hip-hop culture has been used in pedagogy and interventions to promote Black youth's SPD (Akom, 2009; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011; Stovall, 2006). For example, Watts, Abdul-Adil, and Pratt (2002) implemented an intervention with Black boys to promote SPD by having them critically analyze the content of rap music. Through the program, youth used rap music to highlight the sociopolitical conditions that contribute to racial inequality and discuss approaches to address inequality.

Less is known, however, about the implications of hip-hop culture on Black youth's SPD in their everyday lives (Travis, 2013). Rap is the most popular music genre among Black adolescents, with high school youth reporting being exposed to 27 hours of rap music and videos weekly (Greenberg & Mastro, 2008; Tyson et al., 2012). Black youth also show a higher identification with rap artists than artists of other genres (Ward, Day, & Thomas, 2010). However, many studies that examine Black youth's consumption of rap music outside of interventions specifically examine the negative impact of overtly violent, or misogynistic rap music (e.g., Johnson, Adams, Ashburn, & Reed, 1995; Peterson, Wingood, DiClemente,

Harrington, & Davies, 2007; Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005). The few studies that have examined the implications of rap music across broader developmental outcomes have had mixed findings. For example, Dixon, Zhang, and Conrad (2009) found that Black college youth who consumed more rap music videos had higher cultural pride (e.g., positive personal and societal beliefs about being Black) than those who consumed less. In a sample of Black and Latino adolescents, Tyson and colleagues (2012) found both positive and negative school-related effects of hip-hop music media. On the one hand, youth who *watched* more rap music videos had lower grade point averages and higher in-school suspension rates than those who watched less. On the other hand, youth who *listened* to more rap music had lower in-school suspension rates than those who listened to less. Very few studies examine the implications of youth's engagement with hip-hop media (e.g., blogs, social media, radio shows).

Taken together there is evidence that in the context of interventions, hip-hop culture can have positive implications for the sociopolitical development of Black youth (Akom, 2009; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011; Stovall, 2006; Watts et al., 2002). Limited research examines the implications of hip-hop media; however, there is evidence that outside of intervention, rap music and music videos can differentially relate to positive outcomes (e.g., cultural pride, less behavioral issues) and negative outcomes (e.g., lower grades and higher behavioral issues) (Dixon et al., 2009; Tyson et al., 2012). Given that young people are likely exposed to rap and hip-hop media that can have both empowering and illicit content, it is likely that the way they perceive and make meaning of the content in hip-hop has bearing on the impact that hip-hop has on their beliefs and behaviors. Thus, to examine the implications of hip-hop on youth's SPD, it may be important to examine how youth analyze the content in hip-hop culture.

## Youth as Critical Consumers of Hip-Hop Culture

In adolescence, youth develop the ability to engage in metacognition and social cognition, allowing them to analyze their own thought process and the thought process of others deeply. These cognitive skills may allow them to be critical users of media, meaning they may possess the ability to be thoughtful in the media they select and what they extract from media content. The Adolescent Media Practice Model examines the process by which youth interact with media in their everyday lives (Steele & Brown, 1995). Core to this theory is the idea that youth's "lived experiences," described as their cultural background, ideological beliefs, and other experiences, shape how they select, interact, and apply content in media to their identities and beliefs. First, youth are motivated to select media that resonates with their lived experiences. Second, youth cognitively and emotionally evaluate and interpret media content to develop cultural meaning. Finally, youth apply the cultural meaning that they extract from media to their everyday lives, incorporating it into their belief systems and behaviors.

In line with the Adolescent Media Practice Model, the messages that Black youth extract from rap (e.g., music and music videos) as well as hip-hop media (e.g., blogs, social media, and radio shows) are likely informed by their perceptions. Tyson (2005, 2006) argues that one of the primary attitudes and perceptions that youth hold about rap music is the idea the rap music is an empowering art form that critiques oppressive conditions and teaches methods for youth to overcome oppression. Youth's belief that rap music is empowering is likely influential to the impact that hip-hop culture has on their SPD. However, youth may also believe that rap music is explicit and primarily contains content that is violent, misogynistic, and sexist (Tyson, 2005, 2006). The extent to which youth believe that rap music is illicit may also have implications for the impact that hip-hop culture has on their SPD.

## The Present Study

The present study examines the relations between Black youth's consumption of hip-hop culture (e.g., rap and hip-hop media) and their sociopolitical development (e.g., agency and sociopolitical action). Drawing upon the ICE framework (Travis, 2013) and the sociocultural model of sociopolitical development (Anyiwo et al., 2018a), this paper examines how hip-hop culture can provide racial sociopolitical messages to youth that promote SPD (e.g., agency and sociopolitical action). The first research question is:

> $Q_1$ Does Black youth's consumption of hip-hop culture (e.g., rap music, rap music videos, and hip-hop media) predict their SPD?

Youth who frequently consume hip-hop culture are likely to encounter more sociopolitical and empowering themes in hip-hop culture. Consistent with the ICE framework (Travis, 2013) and applied work that has used hip-hop culture to facilitate the SPD of Black youth (Akom, 2009; Sealey-Ruiz & Greene, 2011; Stovall, 2006; Watts et al., 2002), I anticipate that the level of Black youth's engagement with hip-hop culture will be positively associated with each aspect of their SPD. However, since there is some evidence that rap music and music videos can have differential effects on youth outcomes (Tyson et al., 2012), I examine the effect of each element of hip-hop culture separately. Regarding rap music and music videos, I offer the following hypotheses:

> *$H_{1a}$: Black youth's consumption of rap music and rap music videos will be positively associated with their critical agency and sociopolitical action.*

Limited empirical work has examined the implications of hip-hop media (e.g., social media, blogs, radio shows) on Black youth. However, there is evidence that hip-hop media may contain a wide breadth of sociopolitical content by showcasing artists' ideological beliefs outside of their

music. Hip-hop media content can include dialogues about political issues impacting Black communities. Further, through their social media accounts, artists may provide their own social commentary on social issues and model political behavior by engaging in activism (Gutierrez-Morfin, 2016; Poston et al., 2016; Rosario, 2016). Thus, I offer the following hypothesis:

*$H_{1b:}$ Similar to rap music and music videos, Black youth's consumption of hip-hop media will positively predict their critical agency and sociopolitical action.*

*$H_{1c}$ Youth's engagement with hip-hop artists' social media content will be positively associated with their critical agency and sociopolitical action.*

Drawing on the Adolescent Media Practice Model (Steele & Brown, 1995), which holds that youth ideologies can shape how they select, interpret, and integrate content from media, the second research question is:

$Q_2$ Do Black youth's perceptions of rap music moderate the associations between their consumption of rap media (music and music videos) and their SPD?

Hip-hop culture is complex and can simultaneously include messages that promote empowerment (e.g., includes a social analysis of conditions that impact Black community and strategies for youth to overcome oppression) and content that is illicit (e.g., promote violence and misogyny) (Travis, 2013; Tyson, 2005; 2006). Youth's perception that rap music is empowering is likely central to its ability to promote their SPD. Accordingly, we offer the following hypotheses:

*$H_{2a:}$ The relation between rap media and SPD will be stronger for youth who believe that rap is primarily empowering.*

As an exploratory question, we examine youth's perceptions of rap as primarily violent and misogynistic (VM) as a moderator between hip-hop culture and SPD. It is possible for the

moderation effect of VM perceptions to go in either direction. For example, youth who believe that hip-hop is primarily VM may listen to or focus on illicit content in hip-hop culture and thus, be less likely to extract themes that could facilitate their SPD. However, VM perceptions may also be reflective of youth's ability to identify and critique illicit content on hip-hop or their belief that hip-hop culture reflects the negative conditions that impact Black communities, thus facilitating their SPD.

## Methods

### Participants

Participants included 500 Black adolescents, ages 13-17 ( $M$ = 14.97, $SD$ = 1.46). Most participants identified as female (61.8%) or male (37.3%). A small minority of participants identified as transgender, non-binary, or other (0.08%). With regard to ethnicity, a vast majority of youth in this study identified as African American (88.2%) followed by Caribbean American (3.6%), Afro-Latino (2.8%) Multicultural (2.8%), African (2.2%), and other (.4%). Adolescents were recruited across the United States with a majority being in the South (58.6 %), followed by the Midwest (17.3%), Northeast (16.0 %), and West (8.1 %). A little over a third of participants described living in an urban context (37.3 %), another third lived in suburban areas (35.1 %), and final third lived in rural context (27.6 %). Guardian's education was used as a proxy for socioeconomic status. On average, youth reported that their guardian or guardians had attended "some college." Table 4-1 had the descriptive statistics for demographic variables.

### Procedure

Adolescents were recruited from across the United States in 2018 using a Qualtrics online survey panel. Qualtrics recruits participants through a multimethod approach (e.g., actively

managed market research panels, social media, and specialized recruitment campaigns). Parents received an invitation for their child to participate in the study and provided parental content for their child's participation. Adolescents who provided assent were permitted to complete the survey and were compensated through Qualtrics using various awards (e.g., cash, gift cards, redeemable points, and vouchers). Data collection occurred over the course of about 2 months. The survey was 30 minutes long and included a variety of measures assessing participants' media usage, racial experiences, ideological beliefs, sociopolitical behaviors, and psychological outcomes. The survey was randomized for each participant to prevent any bias associated with the survey question order. For this study, I used measures assessing youth's usage of hip-hop culture (e.g., rap music, rap music videos, and hip-hop media), youth's perceptions of rap (e.g., empowering vs. illicit), and youth's sociopolitical development (e.g., activism, cultural pride, political efficacy, and sociopolitical action). Three attention checks were added to the survey to ensure data quality. Participants who answered two or more attention checks incorrectly were screened out of the survey.

## Measures

**Rap Music Consumption.** Two items were used to assess participants' rap music consumption. Participants were asked to report the number of hours per day they listen to music on an average weekday and on an average weekend. Rap music consumption was computed using a composite of their scores on weekdays and weekends.

**Rap Music Video Consumption.** Two items were used to assess participants' rap music videos consumption. Participants were asked to report the number of hours per day that they watch rap music videos (e.g., on television and on the internet) on an average weekday and an

average weekend. Rap music video consumption was computed using a composite of their scores on weekdays and weekends.

**Hip-Hop Media Consumption.** Two approaches were used to assess participants' consumption of hip-hop media. First, participants were asked to respond to 4 items assessing how frequently they watch or listen to popular hip-hop radio and/or online shows (e.g., The Breakfast Club, Sway in the Morning, Ebro in the Morning, DJ Vlad) and how frequently they visit hip-hop blogs and websites (e.g., XXLmag.com, thesource.com, allhiphop.com). Secondly, participants were asked to respond to 6 items assessing how frequently they engage with hip-hop artists through social media. For example, "How often do you visit hip-hop artist's social media profiles (e.g., Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook)?" Each assessment of hip-hop media used a 6-point scale ranging from *Never (1)* to *Daily (6)*.

**Perceptions of Rap Music.** To examine youth perceptions of rap music, I used two subscales (Empowerment and Violent-Misogynistic) from the Rap Music Attitude and Perception Scale (RAP; Tyson, 2005). Participants were given statements about rap and were asked to rate, using a 5-point Likert scale, the extent to which they agree (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The Empowerment subscale has 11 items that measure the perception that rap music critiques oppression and motivates people to take action to counteract oppression. A sample item is "Rap music expresses legitimate frustration with social conditions." The Violent-Misogynistic subscale has 9 items that measure the perception that the content and culture of rap is dominated by representations of violence and misogyny. A sample item includes "Most rap music glorifies drugs and violence." Items worded negatively were rescaled such that higher scores indicated a stronger endorsement of empowerment or violent-misogynistic. The RAP scale was developed and validated in a sample of college students (64.5% Caucasian, 31.5%

Black, 4 % other). Items loaded into three factors: Empowerment (α = .90), Violent-Misogynistic (α = .89), and Artistic-Esthetic (α = .87) (Tyson, 2005). Only the empowerment and violent-misogynistic subscales were used for this study. In a study with Black and Latino adolescents, the Empowerment (α = .84), Violent-Misogynistic (α = .87), subscales had good reliability (Tyson et al., 2012). In this study, both Empowerment (α = .91), Violent-Misogynistic (α = .90), subscales showed evidence of good internal consistency.

**Critical Agency.** The Critical Agency subscale from the Measure of Adolescent Critical Consciousness (MACC; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016) was used to measure critical agency. The Critical Agency subscale consists of 6 items that measure adolescents' belief that they can make a difference in their community and motivation to do so. Participants were given statements reflecting beliefs about efficacy and were asked the extent to which they agree with each statement on a 4-point Likert scale (from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*). A sample item includes, "I can make a difference in my community." The MAAC was developed in a sample of Latino youth to examine critical consciousness around issues of race specifically. However, the items on the scale were not culturally specific and reflected issues pertaining to racial inequality broadly; thus, I found it suitable to use for a Black sample. In the initial study, the scale had good reliability (α = .80). Similarly, in this study, the scale showed good evidence of internal consistency (α = .89).

**Sociopolitical Action.** Sociopolitical action was assessed through two scales: one assessing traditional action and another assessing online action. The Political Change Action subscale from the Anti-Racist Social Action Scale (ARSAS) (Aldana, Bañales, & Richards-Schuster, 2019) was used to assess traditional action. The scale has 7 items used to assess actions to address structural racial inequality. In the original study, youth indicated yes or no to whether

they participated in behaviors in the last year such as "Attended a protest on an issue related to race, ethnicity, discrimination and/or segregation." The ARSAS was developed in partnership with youth to examine the behaviors that youth engage in to address racism in their daily lives. The full scale includes 22 items consisting of action and behaviors that youth can engage in to challenge racism and promote diversity. The assessment of the scales factor structure occurred in a sample of 384 youth who identified as White/European American, Black/African American, Latino/Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Multiracial, and Native American and participated in an online survey (average age 17). The Political Change Action subscale showed evidence of moderate internal consistency ($\alpha = .66$). In the present study, I sought to assess the frequency of youth's sociopolitical action. Thus, youth were asked to report their sociopolitical action on a 5-point Likert-type scale (ranging from *never* to *very frequently*). This measurement showed evidence of good internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$).

Activism online was assessed using adapted items from Kim and colleagues (2016) study on youth online and offline political participation. Kim and colleagues (2016) developed 6 items to examined youth's participants' frequency of participation in online political behaviors in the last year on a 3-point scale (*Never, Occasionally, and Several Times*). Reliability and validity were not assessed in the initial study. A sample item includes, "Participated in an Internet-Based protest." I adapted these items to focus specifically on youth's participation in race-based action online and added additional items to assess participants' use of racial social justice hashtags (e.g., #blacklivesmatter, #icantbreathe) and use of arts-based activism online. Youth were asked to report their online action on a 5-point Likert-type scale (ranging from *never* to *very frequently*) ($\alpha = .94$).

## Data Analysis Plan

I conducted the multiple linear regression analysis in SPSS v25 to examine the relations between hip-hop culture, rap perceptions, and indicators of youth's sociopolitical development (e.g., agency and sociopolitical action). Three regressions were conducted to assess agency, traditional action, and online action. In the first step, the control variables (sex, parent's education, and social media usage) were added. In the second step, the main effects (rap music, rap music videos, hip-hop media, and interaction with hip-hop artists) were added. In the third step, the moderators (empowerment perceptions & violent-misogynistic perception) were added. In the final step, I included the interactions between rap music and music videos and rap perceptions. Missing data on variables ranged from 0 % to 2.2 %. Since the missing data value was lower than 10%, it is unlikely to bias the analyses (Bennett, 2001). Thus, I used the default setting deletion method in SPSS for all analyses.

# Results

## Descriptive Statistics

Table 4-2 includes the descriptive findings for the key study variables. Participants reported listening to about 4.93 hours of music (*SD* = 5.03) and watching about 3.53 hours of rap music videos (*SD* = 4.52) daily. A majority of youth (87.1%) reported reading, watching, or listening to hip-hop media (e.g., blogs/websites, video shows, podcast, urban radio shows). On average, participants described using these forms of media "a few times a year" (*M* = 2.99, *SD* = 1.44). A majority of participants (85.5 %) also reported following and/or interacting with hip-hop artists on social media accounts and interacting with these artists "a few times a year" (*M* = 2.99, *SD* = 1.44). With regard to perceptions of rap, a paired sample t-test analysis revealed that youth had a statistically significantly higher endorsement of rap as empowering (*M* = 3.46, *SD* = 0.80)

than rap as violent and misogynistic ($M$ = 3.26, $SD$ = 0.83). Nevertheless, on average, youth were neutral in their perceptions of rap as empowering and of rap as violent and misogynistic.

In general, youth in this study agreed with statements assessing their motivation and belief in their ability to address racism and discrimination and make an impact on their community (e.g., critical agency) ($M$ = 3.12, $SD$ = 0.67). A majority of youth reported engaging in traditional action (75.3%) and online action (74.3%) to address racism in the last year. However, on average, they reported "rarely" engaging in these behaviors.

Table 4-3 includes the results of correlation analysis across key study variables. Youth's usage of rap music and was positively associated with their consumption of hip-hop media ($r$ = .34, $p$ <.001) and their interaction with hip-hop artists on social media ( $r$ = .32, $p$ < .001). Music videos usage was also positively associated with hip-hop media ($r$ = .38, $p$ < .001) and interaction with hip-hop artists on social media ($r$ = .34, $p$ < .001). Further, youth who listened to more rap music ($r$ = .11, $p$ < .05) and who watched more rap music videos ($r$ = .12, $p$ < .01) had higher perceptions that rap music is empowering. Youth's rates of rap music and music videos usage was not associated with their perceptions of rap as violent and misogynistic. However, youth who consumed more hip-hop media ($r$ = .23, $p$ < .001) and interacted with hip-hop artists on social media ($r$ = .23, $p$< 001) had higher perceptions of rap as violent and misogynistic. Youth's perceptions of rap as violent and misogynistic was also positively associated with their beliefs that rap is empowering ($r$ = .34, $p$ < .001).

With regard to sociopolitical development, critical agency was positively associated with traditional ($r$ = .11, $p$ < .05) and online action ($r$ = .15, $p$ < .001). Further, there was a strong positive association between youth's engagement in traditional action and their engagement in online action ($r$ = .78, $p$ < .001).

There were no statistically significant differences across key study variables based on the region that participants lived.

## Primary Analyses

**Hip-Hop Culture Predicting Critical Agency.** The results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting critical agency is displayed in Table 4-4. Model one, which included the control variables, was statistically significant ($F(3,458) = 3.37$, $p < .05$). Youth who had guardians with higher education had higher critical agency ($\beta = .15$, $p < .01$). Sex and social media usage were not associated with critical agency. The addition of the hip-hop variables in model two contributed to a significant increase of 8% in variation explained in critical agency ($R^2$ change = .08, $p < .001$). Average daily usage of rap music and rap music videos were not associated with critical agency. However, hip-hop media ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$) and hip-hop artists' social media ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$) were positively associated with critical agency. Model three, which included the perceptions of rap music, contributed to a significant increase of 13% of the variance explained in critical agency ($R^2$ change = .13, $p < .001$). With regard to perceptions or rap music, youth who had more empowering perceptions of rap music had higher critical agency ($\beta = .39$, $p < .01$). However, violent-misogynistic perceptions were not significantly related to critical agency. The addition of the interactions between rap and rap perceptions in model four did not contribute to an increase in the variance explained in critical agency and none of the interaction effects were significant.

**Hip-Hop Culture Predicting Traditional and Online Action.** Two hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to assess traditional (see Table 4-5) and online sociopolitical action (see Table 4-6).

Model one in the regression predicting traditional action was significant (F (3, 455) = 3.04, $p < .05$). Youth social media usage was positively associated with their traditional sociopolitical action ($\beta = .13$, $p < .01$). However, sex and guardian's education were not associated. The addition of the hip-hop variables in model two contributed to a significant increase of 25% in variation explained in traditional action ($R^2$ change = .25, $p < .001$). Youth's average daily rap music video usage was positively associated with their traditional action ($\beta = .23$, $p < .01$). However, rap music was not associated. Participants' usage of hip-hop media ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$) and interactions with hip-hop artists on social media ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$) were both positively associated with traditional action. Model three, which included perceptions of rap music, contributed to at 3% of the variance explained in traditional action ($R^2$ change = .03, $p < .001$). VM perceptions were positively associated with traditional action ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$), but EMP perceptions were not associated. The addition of interactions between rap and rap perceptions in model 4 did not increase the variance explained in traditional action. None of the interactions between rap and rap perceptions were significant.

Model one in the regression predicting online action was significant ($F(3, 455 = 4.40$, $p < .01$). Guardians' education was negatively associated with online action ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .01$). However, sex and social media usage were not associated. The addition of the hip-hop variables in model two contributed to a significant increase of 25% in the variation explained in online action ($R^2$ change = .25, $p < .001$). Neither youth's rap music nor rap music videos usage were associated with youth's online sociopolitical action. However, participants' usage of hip-hop media ($\beta = .19$, $p < .01$) and interactions with hip-hop artists on social media ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$) were both positively associated with online action. The addition of rap perceptions variables in model three contributed to a significant increase of 2% in the variation explained in online action

($R^2$ change = .02, $p < .001$). VM perceptions were positively associated with online action ($\beta$ = .13, $p < .001$), but EMP perceptions were not associated. The addition of interactions between rap and rap perceptions in model 4 did not increase the variance explained in online action. None of the interactions between rap and rap perceptions were significant.

## Discussion

Hip-hop is a cultural form rooted in the political resistance and artistic expression of urban Black youth. Yet, limited work has examined the implications of hip-hop on Black youth's sociopolitical beliefs and behaviors. This study investigated the association between youth's consumption of and perceptions towards hip-hop culture and indicators of their sociopolitical development. Scholars have theoretically conceptualized hip-hop as a form of "liberatory praxis" that can facilitate youth's empowerment and bolster them into activism (Akom, 2009; Prier & Beachum; Travis, 2013); thus, I anticipated that youth who listened to more rap music and watched more rap music videos would have higher agency and sociopolitical action. This hypothesis was partially supported. Rap music was not associated with youth's agency in addressing racial issues or with their engagement in traditional or online sociopolitical action to address racism. Consumption of rap music videos was also not associated with youth's agency or online action but was positively associated with traditional action. These findings suggest that rap music video content may not be influential in youth's cognitions about their ability to make a change, but youth may be inspired by such content to engage in social change in their communities. While rap music was positively correlated with sociopolitical action in bivariate analysis, it appears that music is not influential beyond the impact of music videos. This finding is consistent with a recent study that found that music videos were more influential than music in promoting socially conscious themes (Bowman, Knight, Schlue, & Cohen, 2018)

Hip-hop is a cultural form that extends beyond rap music (Travis & Deepak, 2011). Thus, I examined the influence of hip-hop media, as reflected in hip-hop websites, podcasts, and radio/videos shows as well as in hip-hop artists' social media accounts. I anticipated that hip-hop media would be positively associated with youth's agency and sociopolitical action. My hypothesis was supported. Youth who consumed more hip-hop media and who interacted with hip-hop artists on social media had higher agency in their ability to address racism and make a change in their community. These youths also engaged in more traditional and online sociopolitical action.

Hip-hop artists and media figures use their artistic platforms to discuss critical issues that impact Black communities and promote Black engagement in the broader political process (Poston et al., 2016). For example, hip-hop talk shows have conducted interviews with presidential candidates, such as Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, and more recently Kamala Harris and Corey Booker, with the intention of informing their audience about candidate's political platforms and creating a space to discuss the candidates' intentions for the Black community (Gutierrez-Morfin, 2016; Rosario, 2016). Youth who are more immersed in hip-hop through media outlets and through interacting with artists on social media are likely to gain more exposure to the sociopolitical content in hip-hop and to artists' sociopolitical beliefs and action. Research has indicated that political socialization plays a significant role in youth's sociopolitical awareness and activism (e.g., Diemer, 2012). It is likely that youth's consumption of political content in hip-hop media can serve as a form of political and racial socialization that promotes their analysis of racism and action to dismantle it (Anyiwo et al., 2018a). Furthermore, given that Black youth show strong identification with hip-hop artists (Ward et al., 2010), it is probable that

hip-hop artists serve as role models that can motivate youth to engage in action to address racial issues in their communities and in broader society.

Another goal of this study was to examine the impact of youth's perceptions about rap music on their sociopolitical development. In line with the Adolescent Media Practice Model (Steele & Brown, 1995), which holds that youth's ideologies can influence how they interpret media, I anticipated that youth's perceptions of rap music would be influential in the association between their consumption of rap and their sociopolitical development. More specifically, I anticipated that youth who perceive rap as empowering would have higher agency and would report more traditional and online sociopolitical action. My hypotheses were minimally supported. The perceptions of rap music as empowering was positively associated with youth's agency in addressing racism but was not associated with their actual participation in sociopolitical action traditionally nor online. Empowering perceptions was not a significant moderator between rap music media (e.g., rap music and music videos) and sociopolitical development. The findings suggest that youth' beliefs that rap provides a social critique of structural oppression may promote their confidence and motivation to make a change but may not translate to behaviors. On the contrary, more exposure to sociopolitical themes via rap music videos and hip-hop media may be more influential in stimulating activism behaviors.

In addition to empowering themes, rap music contains violent and misogynistic content that reflects the ramifications of intersecting systems of oppression (e.g., economic deprivation, violence, substance abuse, sexism) (Prier, & Beachum, 2008). As an exploratory question, I examined whether youth's perception of rap as violent and misogynistic was associated with their sociopolitical development. I found that violent/misogynistic perceptions were positively associated with youth's agency and their engagement in traditional and online action. Youth who

perceived rap as primarily violent and misogynistic felt confident and motivated in their ability to make a sociopolitical change to combat racism and actually engaged in more sociopolitical action. It is possible that youth's perception of rap as violent and misogynistic may reinforce their alertness to real social conditions that impact Black communities thereby motivating them to engage in sociopolitical action. It should be noted that youth's perceptions of rap as violent and misogynistic were positively correlated with their perceptions of rap as empowering. Thus, youth with violent/misogynistic perceptions were more likely to hold empowering perceptions also. These findings reinforce the idea that youth can simultaneously extract both empowering and violent/misogynistic themes (Travis, 2013). These themes concurrently may be influential in their beliefs in their ability to make a change and their engagement in social change action in their community.

**Limitations**

As with all studies, there are many study limitations that should be addressed. One limitation is that the measurement of hip-hop culture did not assess the content of the hip-hop culture that youth consume. The study focused on the frequency of youth's consumption of rap music, music videos, and hip-hop media but is unclear whether the content in these forms of hip-hop culture reflected sociopolitical and empowering themes. Building on the theoretical work assessing themes in hip-hop (Tyson, 2005, 2006; Travis & Bowman, 2011), a critical future direction would be to conduct a systematic content analysis of rap music and hip-hop media to assess the prevalence of content that promotes social awareness about racism and sociopolitical action. Such work can provide insight into how much exposure youth may get to sociopolitical themes via their engagement with hip-hop culture.

This study also did not assess youth's intentions in their consumption of hip-hop culture. As indicated by the Media Practice Model, youth's lived experiences and ideologies can shape how they select, interpret, and extract meaning from media content (Steele & Brown, 1995). Youth may use media with the intention of self-socialization (Arnett, 1995) or may use media for leisure. Based on the measurements used in this study, it is unclear whether youth actively sought out hip-hop as a mechanism to become socially aware and empowered or if these outcomes are an unintended byproduct of their hip-hop usage. Qualitative inquiry can elucidate the intentions behind youth's engagement with hip-hop culture. Furthermore, qualitative work can provide context to youth's perceptions of rap and provide clarity to how they negotiate the complex content in hip-hop and use it to inform their worldviews and behaviors.

Although the findings of this study establish associations between hip-hop culture and indicators of youth's sociopolitical development, given cross-sectional design, the findings do not provide concrete clarity on the directionality of association. In line with hip-hop pedagogical theories (Akom, 2009; Prier & Beachum, 2008; Stovall, 2006) and ICE Framework (Travis, 2013), I hypothesized that hip-hop culture promotes youth's sociopolitical development. However, it is possible for youth who are engaged more actively in action to address racial issues may also be more likely to seek out hip-hop media, particularly content with sociopolitical themes that resonate with their identity. A longitudinal design would provide clarity on the temporal relations between youth's consumption of hip-hop culture and their sociopolitical development.

**Implications and Future Directions**

Despite hip-hop's roots in political and cultural resistance, limited work outside of intervention has examined the adaptive outcomes associated with youth's consumption of hip-

hop (Tyson et al., 2012). This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating the positive relations between youth's everyday consumption of hip-hop and their sociopolitical development. A major contribution of this study was its examination of hip-hop culture and not rap music exclusively. Rap music alone was not associated with youth's sociopolitical action and rap music videos was positively associated with their action but not their agency. However, hip-hop media and interaction with hip-hop artists on social media were associated with both youth's agency and sociopolitical action, which provides evidence that these forms of hip-hop media may have a stronger impact on youth's sociopolitical development than music media.

The findings of this work underpin the importance of taking a holistic approach in examining the impact of hip-hop on youth. Hip-hop surpasses the boundaries of music (Alridge & Stewart, 2005; Bridges, 2011; Prier & Beachum, 2008; Travis, 2013). However, most studies examining the influence of hip-hop focus solely on rap music or music videos. In this study, youth's engagement with hip-hop culture outside of music had stronger implications for their sociopolitical development than music alone. The vast majority of youth in this study (85.5 %) reported using hip-hop media and following, reposting, or contacting hip-hop artists on social media. More empirical work should examine the implications of Black youth's engagement in broader hip-hop culture on other indicators of their positive development. Furthermore, intervention work using hip-hop should consider mechanisms to integrate content from hip-hop websites, radio shows, and video shows into their curriculum in order to promote youth's social awareness and activism.

The findings of this study also reinforce the idea that youth are critical listeners of rap music. Youth in this study were able to identify both the empowering and violent/misogynistic themes in rap music, which had implications for their sociopolitical development. Whereas we

examined the direct relations between youth perceptions and their outcomes, future works would benefit from a person-centered approach to examining rap perceptions. Person-centered approaches, which allows for the analysis of the patterns of variables across individuals, have been identified as an impactful quantitative tool to identify the processes that allow youth to overcome and dismantle racism (Neblett et al., 2016). Examining youth's rap perception concurrently may elucidate the collective impact of perceptions on youth's SPD and on other outcomes. For example, youth who strongly believe that rap is both empowering and violent/misogynistic may have different outcomes than youth who believe that rap is violent/misogynistic but not empowering or that rap is empowering but not violent/misogynistic. A person-centered approach can provide a holistic understanding of the impact of perceptions on youth's sociopolitical development, which could be useful when conceptualizing the goals of media literacy and hip-hop interventions.

Although not the focus of this study, our analysis found that youth's social media usage was positively associated with their traditional sociopolitical action, meaning that youth who used more social media engaged in more activism in their communities to address racial inequity. Another future direction would be an examination of the impact of other Black-oriented media content in promoting youth's SPD. For example, youth's usage of Black-oriented television was found to be associated with their racial-gendered beliefs about Black women (Anyiwo, Ward, Day Fletcher, & Rowley, 2018b). Content in Black television or movies may be influential in youth's SPD. Black youth may draw from other popular cultural figures outside of hip-hop to inform their sociopolitical beliefs and behaviors. Work in this area can be useful in expanding the scope of interventions used to promote the SPD and civic engagement of Black youth.

## Conclusion

In sum, this study highlights the significance of hip-hop culture as a context for Black youth's sociopolitical development. Further, the findings demonstrate that Black popular culture figures and media content can play a significant role in youth's beliefs that they can make a change and their participation in behaviors to dismantle racism.

Table 4-1

*Demographics of Sample*

| Variable | Count | Valid Percentage | Percentage Missing |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Sex* | | | 0.4 |
| Female | 308 | 61.8 | |
| Male | 186 | 37.3 | |
| Transgender, non-binary, or other | 4 | 0.08 | |
| *Age* | | | 0 |
| 13 | 116 | 23.2 | |
| 14 | 84 | 16.8 | |
| 15 | 104 | 20.8 | |
| 16 | 90 | 18.0 | |
| 17 | 106 | 21.2 | |
| *Ethnicity* | | | 0 |
| African American | 441 | 88.2 | |
| Caribbean American | 18 | 3.6 | |
| Afro-Latino | 14 | 2.8 | |
| African | 11 | 2.2 | |
| Multicultural | 14 | 2.8 | |
| Other | 2 | 0.4 | |
| *Region* | | | 11.2 |
| South | 260 | 16.0 | |
| Midwest | 77 | 17.3 | |
| Northeast | 71 | 58.6 | |
| West | 36 | 8.1 | |
| *Locale* | | | 0.8 |
| Urban | 185 | 37.3 | |
| Suburban | 174 | 35.1 | |
| Rural | 137 | 27.6 | |

Table 4-2

*Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Variables*

| Measure | Mean | SD | Minimum | Maximum | Skewness | Kurtosis | Alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rap Music | 4.93 | 5.03 | 0 | 24 | 1.78 | 3.29 | - |
| Rap Music Video | 3.53 | 4.52 | 0 | 24 | 2.25 | 5.86 | - |
| Hip-Hop Artists Social Media | 3.07 | 1.52 | 1 | 6 | 0.24 | -1.02 | .92 |
| Hip-Hop Media | 2.99 | 1.44 | 1 | 6 | 0.36 | -0.78 | .85 |
| Empowering Perceptions | 3.46 | 0.80 | 1 | 5 | -0.50 | 0.92 | .91 |
| Violent-Misogynistic Perceptions | 3.26 | 0.83 | 1 | 5 | -0.40 | 0.53 | .90 |
| Critical Agency | 3.12 | 0.67 | 1 | 4 | -0.91 | 1.21 | .89 |
| Traditional Sociopolitical Action | 2.07 | 1.11 | 1 | 5 | 0.85 | -0.38 | .94 |
| Online Sociopolitical Action | 2.07 | 1.09 | 1 | 5 | 0.84 | -0.29 | .94 |
| Daily Social Media Usage | 6.75 | 5.50 | 0 | 24 | 1.11 | 0.76 | - |

Table 4-3

*Correlations Across Key Study Variables and Control Variables*

| Measures | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Rap Music | - | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Rap Music Video | **.77*** ** | - | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Hip-Hop Artists Social Media | **.32*** ** | **.34*** ** | - | | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Hip-Hop Media | **.34*** ** | **.38*** ** | **.79*** ** | - | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Empowering Perceptions | **.11*** | **.12**** | **.49*** ** | **.48*** ** | - | | | | | | | |
| 6. Violent-Misogynistic Perceptions | .03 | .01 | **.23*** ** | **.23*** ** | **.34*** ** | - | | | | | | |
| 7. Critical Agency | -.04 | -.06 | **.21*** ** | **.20*** ** | **.41*** ** | **.21*** ** | - | | | | | |
| 8. Traditional Sociopolitical Action | **.22*** ** | **.30*** ** | **.47*** ** | **.45*** ** | **.29*** ** | **.26*** ** | **.11*** | - | | | | |
| 9. Online Sociopolitical Action | **.20**** | **.24*** ** | **.50*** ** | **.48*** ** | **.31*** ** | **.23*** ** | **.15**** | **.78*** ** | - | | | |
| 10. Daily Social Media Usage | **.47*** ** | **.38*** ** | **.20*** ** | **.19*** ** | **.14**** | .07 | .01 | **.13**** | .08 | - | | |
| 11, Guardian Education | **-.12**** | **-.13**** | -.07 | -.06 | .03 | -.01 | **.16*** ** | -.05 | **-.14**** | -.01 | - | |
| 12. Sex | .02 | -.01 | -.05 | -.04 | -.03 | .08 | -.01 | -.03 | -.06 | **.11*** | -.03 | - |

*Note.* Sex was coded as 1 for female and 0 for male. Bolded correlations are significant. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, ***, $p \leq .001$

Table 4-4

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses of Hip-Hop Predicting Critical Agency*

| Variable | *B* | *SE B* | *β* | *95% CI* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | | | |
| Sex | -.02 | .06 | -.01 | [-.14, .11] |
| Guardians' Education | **.06**** | **.02** | **.15** | **[.02, .10]** |
| Social Media Usage | .00 | .01 | .02 | [-.01, .01] |
| $R^2$ | **.02*** | | | |
| Step 2 | | | | |
| Rap Music | .00 | .01 | -.03 | [-.02. .02] |
| Rap Music Videos | -.02 | .01 | -.12 | [-.04, .00] |
| Hip-Hop Artists Social Media | **.08*** | **.03** | **.18** | **[.02, .14]** |
| Hip-Hop Media | **.07*** | **.03** | **.15** | **[.00, .13]** |
| $R^2$ | **.10***** | | | |
| $R^2\Delta$ | **.08***** | | | |
| Step 3 | | | | |
| Violent-Misogynistic Perception | .06 | .04 | .08 | [-.01, .13] |
| Empowerment Perceptions | **.32**** | **.04** | **.39** | **[.24, .40]** |
| $R^2$ | **.23***** | | | |
| $R^2\Delta$ | **.13***** | | | |
| Step 4 | | | | |
| Rap Music X EMP | .00 | .01 | .00 | [-.03, .03] |
| Rap Music X VMP | .00 | .01 | .01 | [-.03, .03] |
| Rap Music Videos X EMP | .01 | .01 | .07 | [-.02, .04] |
| Rap Music Videos X VMP | -.02 | .02 | -.13 | [-.05, .01] |
| $R^2$ | **.24***** | | | |
| $R^2\Delta$ | .01 | | | |

*Note.* Sex was coded as 1 for female and 0 for male. Predictor variables were centered to the mean. Values in bold were statistically significant. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, ***, $p \leq .001$

Table 4-5

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses of Hip-Hop Predicting Traditional Sociopolitical Action*

| Variable | *B* | *SE B* | *β* | *95% CI* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | | | |
| Sex | -.10 | .11 | -.04 | [-.31, .11] |
| Guardians' Education | -.04 | .03 | -.05 | [-.11, .03] |
| Social Media Usage | **.03**** | **.01** | **.13** | **[.01, .04]** |
| $R^2$ | **.20***** | | | |
| Step 2 | | | | |
| Rap Music | -.02 | .02 | -.08 | [-.05, .01] |
| Rap Music Videos | **.06**** | **.02** | **.23** | **[.02, .09]** |
| Hip-Hop Artists Social Media | **.19***** | **.05** | **.29** | **[.12. .31]** |
| Hip-Hop Media | **.11*** | **.05** | **.17** | **[.03, .23]** |
| $R^2$ | **.27***** | | | |
| $R^2\Delta$ | **.25**** | | | |
| Step 3 | | | | |
| Violent-Misogynistic Perception | **.23***** | **.06** | **.17** | **[.11, .34]** |
| Empowerment Perceptions | .03 | .07 | .01 | [-.11, .15] |
| $R^2$ | **.29***** | | | |
| $R^2\Delta$ | **.03***** | | | |
| Step 4 | | | | |
| Rap Music X EMP | -.03 | .02 | -.13 | [-.08, .01] |
| Rap Music X VMP | .02 | .02 | .07 | [-.03, .07] |
| Rap Music Videos X EMP | .02 | .02 | .07 | [-.03, .07] |
| Rap Music Videos X VMP | -.01 | .03 | -.02 | [-.06, .04] |
| $R^2$ | **.30***** | | | |
| $R^2\Delta$ | .01 | | | |

*Note.* Sex was coded as 1 for female and 0 for male. Predictor variables were centered to the mean. Values in bold were statistically significant. * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, ***, $p \leq .001$

Table 4-6

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Hip-Hop Predicting Online Sociopolitical Action*

| Variable | *B* | *SE B* | *β* | *95% CI* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | | | |
| Sex | -.15 | .10 | -.07 | [-.36, .05] |
| Guardians' Education | **-.10**** | **.03** | **-.13** | **[-.17, -.03]** |
| Social Media Usage | .02 | .01 | .08 | [.00, .03] |
| $R^2$ | **.03**** | | | |
| Step 2 | | | | |
| Rap Music | -.01 | .01 | -.04 | [-.04, .02] |
| Rap Music Videos | .03 | .02 | .12 | [.00, .06] |
| Hip-Hop Artists Social Media | **.23***** | **.05** | **.32** | **[.14, .33]** |
| Hip-Hop Media | **.14**** | **.05** | **.19** | **[.04, .24]** |
| $R^2$ | **.28***** | | | |
| $R^2\Delta$ | **.25***** | | | |
| Step 3 | | | | |
| Violent-Misogynistic Perception | **.17***** | **.06** | **.13** | **[.06, .28]** |
| Empowerment Perceptions | .05 | .07 | .04 | [-.08, .18] |
| $R^2$ | **.30***** | | | |
| $R^2\Delta$ | **.02**** | | | |
| Step 4 | | | | |
| Rap Music X EMP | -.01 | .02 | -.05 | [-.05, .03] |
| Rap Music X VMP | .00 | .02 | -.02 | [-.05, .04] |
| Rap Music Videos X EMP | .00 | .02 | .01 | [-.04, .05] |
| Rap Music Videos X VMP | .00 | .02 | .02 | [-.04. .05] |
| $R^2$ | **.30***** | | | |
| $R^2\Delta$ | .00 | | | |

*Note.* Sex was coded as 1 for female and 0 for male. Predictor variables were centered to the mean. Values in bold were statistically significant. *$p \leq .05$, **$p \leq .01$, ***, $p \leq .001$

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

In the last few years, Black Americans have faced atrocities that mirror the legalized hostile violence that occurred during the Jim Crow era. In addition to the pervasive police killings of unarmed Black Americans, Black youth like Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis have been racially profiled and slain by civilians for being Black in the wrong neighborhood (Teasley, Schiele, Adams, & Okilwa, 2017) and for playing music "too loud" (Luscombe, 2014). In the last decade, the sociopolitical conditions of Black people in America has rapidly shifted from embracing the possibilities of decreased racial bias against Black Americans, following the election of the first Black president, (Franco & Smith-Bynum, 2016) to acknowledging the realities of racial contention, following racial terrorism like the mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church (Anderson et al., 2018). These racial attacks are symptoms of broader systems of oppression that permeate the core of American society and shape the life trajectory of Black children. In many ways, America has regressed in its attempts to rectify its legacy of systemic racial marginalization, as evidenced by vast segregation and disproportionate treatment in the educational system (Noguera, Pierce, & Ahram, 2015), disparities in punishment in the justice system (Alexander, 2010), gentrification in urban cities (Goetz, 2011), and racial disparities in employment (Doede, 2016). Given the immense structural barriers that Black Americans face, along with the normative developmental challenges experienced in childhood and adolescence, Black youth are tasked with navigating and coping with social stratification produced by racism (García Coll et al., 1996).

In the midst of racial contention, Black youth are actively engaged in sociopolitical movements that have sought to promote community change and drive social policy. Nevertheless, in psychological and social work research, insufficient attention has been given to how Black youth develop an understanding of and actively resist against racism in their sociopolitical context (Anyiwo et al., 2018a; Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012). Grounded in a social justice lens, this dissertation helps to address this gap in the literature by integrating work in psychology and social work to investigate theoretically and empirically: 1) the sociocultural processes that promote Black youth's SPD and 2) the implications of Black youth's sociopolitical action on their well-being.

**Identifying the Racial Context of SPD**

Study one presented a theoretical framework that integrated racial sociocultural factors into the process of Black youth's sociopolitical development. Previous work has identified the developmental significance of how racially marginalized youth contest oppression (Diemer, Rapa, Voight, & McWhirter, 2016; Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). However, limited work has extensively unpacked the role of racial experiences in shaping the sociopolitical awareness and resistance of racially marginalized youth. Study one applied a racial lens to SPD theory to illuminate the sociocultural processes and experiences that can inform how Black youth make meaning of and resist against racism.

A plethora of research highlights the usefulness of sociocultural factors, such as racial socialization and racial identity, as protective factors against the deleterious effects of racial discrimination (see Neblett et al., 2012). However, it is unclear how these protective factors inform how youth understand and respond to racism on a structural level. Drawing from this

work, I applied a structural lens to racial and cultural processes to illuminate how racial experiences and beliefs can work in tandem to promote youth's ability to transform racial structures that impede their positive development. This theoretical paper provides a testable model that can be used to inform future research on the process of Black youth's SPD with regard to issues of race.

The empirical studies in this dissertation provide evidence for the sociocultural framework in study one. Study two confirms the associations between Black youth's experience of racial discrimination and their sociopolitical action to contest racial inequity. The findings suggest that youth's direct experiences of racial discrimination can inform their sociopolitical actions in their communities and online. Furthermore, direct racial discrimination seems to have a stronger effect on youth's action than vicarious racial discrimination. Similarly, study three provides evidence that racial socialization via youth's engagement with Black popular culture may prompt youth's beliefs that racism is an issue to be addressed, promote their confidence in their ability to address racism, and stimulate actual participation in sociopolitical action.

Collectively, these studies provide foundational knowledge on the racial factors that promote Black youth's sociopolitical awareness and action to contest racism. From a historical lens, this knowledge can provide insight to the factors that may have prompted Black youth's advocacy in historical social justice movements (e.g., civil rights, Black power movement) and may provide an understanding of why and how Black youth presently engage in racial resistance. Further, the findings of my dissertation provide a framework that can be used by scholars to conduct more work to deconstruct how sociocultural factors work in tandem to shape SPD. Building upon this research, more theoretical work can be done to disentangle the complexity of the features of Black youth's SPD. For example, future work should consider how potentially

salient identities and experiences such gender, sexual orientation, social economic status can shape and define elements of Black youth's racial awareness and action (Anyiwo et al., 2018a).

The theoretical and empirical work presented through this dissertation can also be used to inform theories of change for interventions aimed to facilitate youth's SPD. Research on youth's SPD often focus on youth's ability to problematize or critically social analyze social inequity but negates sociopolitical action (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). In other words, as described by Watts and Hipolito-Delgado (2015), the field seems to focus on promoting the ability to "think ourselves to liberation" rather than focusing on acting to resist inequity (e.g., sociopolitical action). My dissertation provides theoretical and empirical evidence that factors like popular culture, experiences of racial discrimination, experiences of racial socialization, and racial identity can prompt youth's engagement in liberatory actions. Scholars, educators, social work practitioners, and parents can use this work to consider how youth's racialized experiences in schools, homes, and in their communities can inform youth's desire to be advocates for social change. For example, conversations about race and politics, with adult figures and peers, may stimulate youth's awareness and motivated them to action. Similarly, educators may implement traditional and digital social justice curriculum in public schools (e.g., Black Lives Matter units) and culturally enriching programs that provide an infrastructure for youth action (e.g., youth participatory action program) (Price-Dennis, 2016; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015).

**The Role of Media and Popular Culture in Black Youth's SPD**

The findings of this dissertation also provide insight into the significance of media and popular culture as tools for Black youth's sociopolitical action. As evident in studies two and three, 74.3% of Black youth described using the internet to address racism. Their online sociopolitical action included behaviors like sharing social and political content online, using

racial hashtags to discuss racial events, creating social and political content (e.g., blogs, art, and videos), and signing online petitions. Although scholars have identified the significance of Black Americans' social media activism in driving sociopolitical change (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2016; Rickford, 2016; Schuschke & Tynes, 2016), there is a need to further identify the features of online activism. This study used an adapted questionnaire from a previous study because very limited online activism measures exist. Future work should consider employing qualitative interviews or focus groups with youth to more clearly identify the types of actions that youth engage in to promote sociopolitical change. This work can inform the development of youth online action measures that can be used to understand the predictors and outcomes of online action better.

A major contribution of this dissertation is the consideration of media and popular culture as a context for Black youth's SPD. Although commonly examined as a negative influence on youth, study three found that Black youth's rap music video usage was associated with their participation in more sociopolitical action (e.g., contacting elected officials, attending meetings or protest) to address racial issues. Youth's consumption of hip-hop culture outside of music had stronger and more widespread impact on their SPD. Youth who followed and/or interacted with hip-hop artists on social media and who consumed more hip-hop media (e.g., podcast, video/radio shows, and websites) reported higher beliefs in their ability to make a change and higher engagement in both traditional and online racial justice sociopolitical action. These findings reinforce theoretical work in education and social work that has identified hip-hop as a source of liberation and empowerment for Black youth (Akom, 2009; Travis, 2013; Travis & Deepak, 2011; Tyson, 2006).

Though many hip-hop interventions focus on the analysis or creation of music, the findings of this study suggest that artists' social media usage and media coverage outside of their music had a stronger effect on youth's critical agency and action than their music media (e.g., rap music and rap music videos). Thus, clinicians and interventionists who use hip-hop in therapy (e.g., Tyson, 2002; Washington, 2018) or who facilitate hip-hop pedagogy (e.g., Akom, 2009; Stovall, 2006) should consider integrating content outside of the music (e.g., radio shows, hip-hop talk shows, websites, podcasts) into their curriculum and/or interventions. For example, Akom (2009) describes a hip-hop course that consisted of community dialogue about pertinent social justice issues, interviews with individuals in the hip-hop industry, and artists' performances. Through the course, Akom (2009) used hip-hop culture as a mechanism to cultivate critical social analyses of systems of oppression that impact marginalized communities. Future work can implement similar types of interventions and evaluate the impact on youth's SPD.

Study three found that youth's ability to identify violent and misogynistic content in hip-hop music was related to their sociopolitical action to contest racism. This finding suggests that critical media literacy may be an important tool in providing Black youth a context to interpret, contextualize, and resist media content that is stereotypical (Kellner & Share, 2005; McArthur, 2015). Previous intervention work with Black youth have focused on identifying and challenging stereotypical content in hip-hop (e.g., Watts et al., 2002) and television (Anyiwo, Richards-Schuster, & Jerald, 2019) as a mechanism to promote youth's SPD. Parents may play a significant role in the impact of hip-hop on SPD. Parents can use hip-hop media as a mechanism to converse with their children about stereotypical and illicit content in hip-hop (e.g., misogyny,

drug use, violence), which in turn can promotes youth's ability to critically analyze hip-hop and recognize the need to address such issues through sociopolitical action (McArthur, 2015).

The findings of study three also reinforce a need to examine Black youth's broader engagement with Black-oriented media content and Black media figures. In this digital society, the visibility of sociopolitical realities impacting Black people has become more prominent due to social media and increased mainstream dialogue about racial issues in the news. Sociopolitical themes are present in entertainment media due to an increase in the representation of Black actors, directors, and producers. In the last few years, there has been a resurgence in the presence of Black television shows on local and cable television, such as "Black-*ish*", that incorporate content reflecting the diversity in cultural experiences of Black people and the harsh realities of combating and coping with racial marginalization (Acham, 2018). Similarly, critically acclaimed Black movies, such as "Hidden Figures" and "Black Panther", promote narratives of cultural pride and highlight various philosophical beliefs on how to overcome the racial barriers (Pallotta, 2017; White, 2018). Such content is likely to inform how youth cultivate their racial attitudes, cultural identities, and sociopolitical identities and may be influential in facilitating their sociopolitical action.

Black youth's connections to Black media figures may also be influential in bolstering their confidence in their ability to make a change as well as their activism. This work focused on rap artists; however, future work can examine the influences of other prominent media figures. For example, athletes, such as Colin Kaepernick and LeBron James, have used their media platforms to protest against social inequality publically. A recent qualitative study found Black college youth draw on media portrayals of Black popular culture figures (e.g., athletes and artists) and Black males who have been victimized by police to inform their critical social

analysis of how Black masculinity tropes shape Black men's marginalization (Goodwill et al., 2018). Thus, youth's analysis of the behaviors and treatment of prominent social media figures may inform their perspectives of social inequity in society and may bolster them into action. Educators and parents can draw from representations in media to inform critical dialogue with youth about racial inequity and facilitate their SPD (Anyiwo et al., 2019).

**Racial Justice Action and Mental Health**

Youth sociopolitical action is often discussed as a protective factor that can improve youth's ability to navigate the distress caused by racial oppression (Ginwright, 2010); Hope & Spencer, 2017). However, in this dissertation, youth's engagement in traditional sociopolitical action to address issues of race was not found to be protective. Moreover, youth's online action was found to be directly associated with elevated symptoms of depression and anxiety and to exacerbate the associations between vicarious racial discrimination and mental health outcomes. These findings highlight that the relation between Black youth's sociopolitical action and mental health may be more complex than previously theorized. A potential reason for the positive associations between action and adverse mental health outcomes is the reality that sociopolitical change takes time. As argued by Ballard, Hoyt, and Pachucki (2018), the slow pace of social change may contribute to frustration and/distress around activism, which can translate to negative health outcomes. This frustration may be pronounced for youth who engage in online action. Given the widespread knowledge and information that individuals can have exposure to on the internet, youth engaging in online action have the ability to contest issues that are distal from their communities. Therefore, it may be harder to see the effects of online action firsthand.

More research is needed to clarify the psychological impact of sociopolitical action on Black youth's well-being. Study two highlights that the *type* of sociopolitical action (e.g.,

traditional vs. online action) youth engage in may have differential implications for their mental health. Indeed, previous work has found that different types of prosocial behaviors (e.g., volunteering, activism, civic engagement) can have differential effects on youth's health trajectory (Ballard et al., 2018). A pertinent next step of the literature would be to 1) examine the potential differential impact of multiple forms of sociopolitical action on youth's mental health and 2) identify the moderating and mediating factors that may shape the association between sociopolitical action and mental health.

As school and community-based programs work to promote youth's sociopolitical awareness and civic engagement, they should also be intentional about creating spaces for youth to process the emotions and challenges that emerge because of sociopolitical action. Social support may be a key factor to consider when examining the implications of sociopolitical action of youth well-being. For example, a recent qualitative study with youth of color found that sociopolitical action via youth organizing promoted youth's confidence and provided psychological relief from the distress associated with oppression (Ortega-Williams, Wernick, DeBower, & Brathwaite, 2018). Social support via their peers in youth organization and mentoring from adults were factors that promoted healing. Such social support may be particularly important in online context as youth are likely to have the ability to engage in online sociopolitical action by themselves. Programs and interventions can provide safe space for youth to express themselves and engage in resistance online while being guided and mentored by adults (e.g., Price-Dennis, 2016).

**National Sample of Black Youth**

Despite Black American's legacy of sociopolitical resistance, limited empirical work in social work and psychology examine the factors that shape the sociopolitical behaviors of Black

youth. My dissertation employed an online survey panel to recruit a sample of 500 Black adolescents from across the nation to examine the precedents and antecedents of their sociopolitical development. Although my sample was not nationally representative, I had a regionally diverse sample with a representation of youth from the Southern, Midwest, Northeast, and Western regions of the USA. The diversity of representation can increase the probability that the study captures Black youth with a variety of sociopolitical experiences and beliefs. However, despite the diversity in our sample, many biases may still exist in online survey research. For example, participants in online survey panels are often higher internet users, tend to be higher income, and have higher education relative to the general population (Fuligni, 2014; Hays, Liu, & Kapteyn, 2015). Despite these potential limitations, the findings of this study provide great insight into the factors that shape Black youth's sociopolitical development around issues of racial inequity. Nevertheless, more empirical work is needed to provide a multifaceted understanding of Black youth's sociopolitical development.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, using a social justice lens, this dissertation investigated the sociocultural factors that promote Black youth's advocacy to promote racial justice. This dissertation challenges research that often frames historically marginalized youth as vulnerable or "at risk" by considering the factors that promote agency and self-determination of youth to positively transform their communities and their society. Across the three studies presented, the dissertation illuminates the role of cultural factors and racial experiences in shaping Black youth's awareness of racism, motivation and confidence in their ability to address racism, and engagement in critical behaviors to combat racism. Further, the findings highlight the significance of digital

media and popular culture as a context for youth action and as an influential force that shapes sociopolitical action.

The findings of this work also highlight the reality that engagement in sociopolitical action may be psychologically distressing for Black youth. However, drawing on the words of hip-hop artist Kendrick Lamar, “we gon be alright.” People of African ancestry have a legacy grounded in political resistance and cultural resilience. This legacy includes challenging unjust systems that produce adverse conditions but also drawing on cultural strengths to promote healing from oppression. Moving forward, scholars and social work practitioners should be intentional in drawing from this cultural legacy to inform future work examining mechanisms to promote the healing of Black youth as these youth continue to advocate for racial equity.

## Appendix A: Parental Consent

### Consent to be Part of a Research Study

**Title of the Project:** The Black Youth Identity, Media, and Political Action Project

**Principal Investigator:**
*Nkemka Anyiwo, MSW*
Doctoral Candidate, Joint Program in Social Work and Psychology,
University of Michigan
**Faculty Advisors:**
*Stephanie Rowley, PhD*
Professor, Department of Psychology
University of Michigan
*Daphne Watkins, PhD*
Associate Professor, School of Social Work
University of Michigan

### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

We are inviting your child to participate in a research study. In order to participate, your child must be between the ages of 13-17. Participation in this study is voluntary.

### What is the study about and why are we doing it?

The purpose of the study is to examine how young people engage with media and how they understand and respond to their cultural and political atmosphere.

### What will happen if your child takes part in this study?

Your child will be asked to respond to an anonymous survey, which assesses their racial and cultural experiences, beliefs about issues affecting society, their beliefs about their selves and others, and their patterns of media usage. The survey should take about 30 minutes to complete. If you would like to access of copy of the survey, you can access it here**.**

### How could your child benefit from this study?

Although your child may not receive a direct benefit from participating, the findings of this study will inform future research and interventions focused on the cultural and civic factors that support youth's positive development.

### What risks might result from your child being in this study?

As your child responds to questions about their racial and cultural experiences, they may reflect on experiences that were frustrating or upsetting. If your child feels uncomfortable at any time, they can choose to skip a specific question or stop the survey.

**How will we protect your child's information?**

We plan to publish the results of this study and share the findings in public settings. Because the survey is anonymous, we cannot link any survey responses to you or your child's personal information.

The data will be stored on password-protected computer files with access only by the study team. We will plan to keep the data for up to five years for study and recordkeeping purposes.

**What will happen to the information we collect about your child after the study is over?**

We will keep the research data from this study to use for future research. We will not have access to any identifiable information.

We may share the research data with other investigators without asking for your consent again, but it will not contain information that could directly identify you or your child.

**Your Child's Participation in this Study is Voluntary**

It is totally up to your child to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. In addition to your consent, your child must also provide assent to participate. Even if your child decides to be part of the study now, they may change their mind and stop at any time. Your child may also choose to not answer a question for any reason. If you or your child choose to withdraw from the research, your data will not be shared with us.

**Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research**

If you have questions about this research, you may contact us at:

**Principal Investigator:**
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Associate Professor, School of Social Work, University of Michigan
**daphnew@umich.edu**
**734-763-1540**

**Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant**

If you have questions about your child's rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

University of Michigan
Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board
2800 Plymouth Road
Building 520, Room 1169

Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800
Phone: (734) 936-0933 or toll free, (866) 936-0933
Email: irbhsbs@umich.edu

**Parent or Legally Authorized Representative Permission**

By allowing your child to move forward with the survey, you are agreeing to your child's participation in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you agree. If you have any questions about the study after you agree for your child to participate, you can contact the study team using the information provided above. If you are able too, print out or save this form to your computer so that you can review this information again.

1. I agree to my child's participation in this survey
2. I DO NOT agree to my child's participation in this survey

**If No Consent:**

**We understand that you did not agree to participate in this survey.**
Thank you for your consideration. ‘

## Appendix B: Child Assent

### Assent to be Part of a Research Study

**Title of the Project:** The Black Youth Identity, Media, and Political Action Project

**Principal Investigator:**
Nkemka Anyiwo, MSW
Doctoral Candidate, Joint Program in Social Work and Psychology,
University of Michigan
**Faculty Advisors:**
Stephanie Rowley, PhD
Professor, Department of Psychology
University of Michigan
Daphne Watkins, PhD
Associate Professor, School of Social Work
University of Michigan

**Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

We are inviting you to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be between the ages of 13-17 and identify as Black. Participation in this study is voluntary.

**What is the study about and why are we doing it?**

The purpose of the study is to examine how young people engage with media and how they understand and respond to their cultural and political atmosphere.

**What will happen if you take part in this study?**

Your parent has given you permission to participate in this research study. However, the decision is up to you if you would like to participate.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to respond to an anonymous survey, which will include questions to learn more about your racial and cultural experiences, your beliefs about issues affecting the society, your beliefs about yourself and others, and your media usage. The survey should take about 30 minutes to complete.

**How could you benefit from this study?**

While you may not receive a direct benefit from participating, the findings of this study will help researchers better understand the cultural factors that help young people as they develop. The findings from this study can help guide the creation of programs and interventions to help young people be successful and psychologically well.

**What risks might result from being in this study?**

As you respond to questions about your racial and cultural experiences, you may think about experiences that were frustrating or upsetting. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you can skip a specific question or stop the survey.

**How will we protect your information?**

We plan to publish the results of this study and share the findings in public settings. We will not ask you for any personal information about your identity.

The data will be stored on password-protected computer files with access only by the study team. We will plan to keep the data for up to five years for study and recordkeeping purposes.

**What will happen to the information we collect about you after the study is over?**

We will keep the research data from this study to use for future research. We may share the research data with other investigators without asking for your permission again, but it will not contain information that could directly identify you.

**Your Participation in this Study is Voluntary**

It is totally up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may also choose to not answer a question for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research, your data will not be shared with us.

**Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research**

If you have questions about this research, you may contact us at:

**Principal Investigator:**
Nkemka Anyiwo, MSW
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Daphne Watkins, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, School of Social Work, University of Michigan
**daphnew@umich.edu**
**734-763-1540**

**Contact Information for Questions about Your Rights as a Research Participant**

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

University of Michigan
Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board
2800 Plymouth Road
Building 520, Room 1169
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800

Phone: (734) 936-0933 or toll free, (866) 936-0933
Email: irbhsbs@umich.edu

**Assent**

By moving forward with the survey, you are agreeing to participate in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you agree. If you have any questions about the study, you can contact the study team using the information provided above. If you can, print out or save this form to your computer so that you can review this information again.

___ I agree to participate in this survey
____I DO NOT agree to participate in this survey

**If No Assent:**

**We understand that you did not agree to participate in this survey.**
Thank you for your consideration.

## Appendix C: Racial Discrimination Measures

### Direct Racial Discrimination
### Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000)

After each statement, tell us how often you have experienced each of the following types of discrimination because of your race or ethnicity in the *last year.* Remember we are asking about occasions when race-ethnic discrimination was at least partly responsible for your experience.

| | Never (1) | Rarely (2) | Sometimes (3) | Frequently (4) | Very Frequently (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| You were discouraged from joining an advanced level class. | | | | | |
| You were wrongly disciplined or given after-school detention. | | | | | |
| You were given a lower grade than you deserved. | | | | | |
| You were discouraged from joining a club. | | | | | |
| Others your age did not include you in their activities. | | | | | |
| People expected more of you than they expected of others your age. | | | | | |
| People expected less of you than they expected of others your age. | | | | | |
| People assumed your English was poor. | | | | | |
| You were hassled by police. | | | | | |
| You were hassled by a store clerk or store guard. | | | | | |
| You were called racially insulating names. | | | | | |
| You received poor service at a restaurant or store. | | | | | |
| People acted as if they thought you were not smart. | | | | | |
| People acted as if they were afraid of you. | | | | | |
| You were threatened. | | | | | |

## Vicarious Racial Discrimination

**Modified items from adolescent version of the Index of Race-Related Stress (IRRS) (Seaton, 2003; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996), and Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index (ADDI; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000), and newly created items.**

Think about the race-related experiences of Black people that you know or have heard about. In the last year, how often have you **witnessed or heard** about Black people OTHER than yourself being:

| | Never (1) | Rarely (2) | Sometimes (3) | Frequently (4) | Very Frequently (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Made fun of or harassed because they had "Black features" | | | | | |
| Threatened with physical violence by a person or group | | | | | |
| Unfairly charged with a crime | | | | | |
| Treated unfairly by teachers or administrators at school | | | | | |
| Followed by a salesperson or security officer while shopping | | | | | |
| Portrayed negatively in radio, TV, newspapers, or history books | | | | | |
| Physically attacked by a person or group | | | | | |
| Given a jail or prison sentence more severe than others | | | | | |
| Not hired for a job or internship | | | | | |
| Treated disrespectfully at a business (e.g., refused service or had poor service) | | | | | |
| Harassed or treated disrespectfully by police officers | | | | | |
| Fired from a job or internship | | | | | |
| Harassed on public transportation (e.g., bus, train) | | | | | |
| Physically assaulted by police officers | | | | | |
| Shot or killed by police officers | | | | | |

## Appendix D: Sociopolitical Development Measures

### Critical Agency

Critical agency subscale from Measure of Adolescent Critical Consciousness (McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016)

Please circle the response that fits best for you, using the following scale:

| | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Agree (3) | Strongly Agree (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| There are ways that I can contribute to my community | | | | |
| I am motivated to try to end racism and discrimination | | | | |
| It is important to fight against social and economic inequality | | | | |
| I can make a difference in my community | | | | |
| More effort is needed to end racism and discrimination | | | | |
| It is important to me to contribute to my community | | | | |
| In the future, I will participate in activities or groups that struggle against racism and discrimination | | | | |

**Traditional Sociopolitical Action**

Political Change Action Subscale from the Anti-Racist Social Action Scale (ARSA) (Aldana, Bañales, & Richards-Schuster, 2019)

Reflecting on your behavior in the *last year*, how frequently have you:

| | Never (1) | Rarely (2) | Sometimes (3) | Frequently (4) | Very Frequently (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Called/written/emailed the media (i.e. newspaper, TV, internet) when you have seen something that is offensive. | | | | | |
| Called/written/emailed an elected official (i.e. city council, mayor, legislator). | | | | | |
| Attended a protest on an issue related to race, ethnicity, discrimination and/or segregation. | | | | | |
| Organized your own action project on an issue related to race, ethnicity, discrimination and/or segregation. | | | | | |
| Invited someone to a meeting or protest related to race, ethnicity, discrimination, and/or segregation. | | | | | |
| Inspired others to work on issues related to race, ethnicity, discrimination, and/or segregation. | | | | | |
| Researched/investigated issues or social problems in my community. | | | | | |

**Online Action**
Adapted items from Kim, Russo, & Amnå (2016) with newly created items.

Thinking about your behavior online around issues related to **race or ethnicity**, how often have you done the following in the last year

| | Never (1) | Rarely (2) | Sometimes (3) | Frequently (4) | Very Frequently (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Signed an online petition | | | | | |
| Participated in an internet-based protest | | | | | |
| Wrote about politics or social issues on social media or on a blog | | | | | |
| Linked video clips with a political content (e.g., memes, GIFs, articles) | | | | | |
| Connected to a group on social media that is concerned about societal issues | | | | | |
| Sent music online that I think has a good political societal message | | | | | |
| Used hashtags on social media to raise awareness about an issue (e.g. #blacklivesmatter). | | | | | |
| Shared art online that you created to address social issues (e.g., music, graphics) | | | | | |

## Appendix E: Mental Health Measures

### Anxiety and Depressive Symptoms

Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale (Ebesutani et al., 2012)

Please select the word that shows how often each of these things happens to you. There are no right or wrong answers.

| | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neither agree nor disagree (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly agree (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I feel sad or empty **(D1)** | | | | | |
| I worry when I think that I have done poorly at something **(A1)** | | | | | |
| I would feel afraid of being on my own at home (**A2**) | | | | | |
| Nothing is much fun anymore **(D2)** | | | | | |
| I worry that something awful will happen to someone in my family (**A3**) | | | | | |
| I am afraid of being in crowded places (like shopping centers, the movies, buses, busy playgrounds) (**A4**) | | | | | |
| I worry what other people think of me (**A5**) | | | | | |
| I have trouble sleeping (**D3**) | | | | | |
| I feel afraid if I have to sleep on my own (**A6**) | | | | | |
| I have problems with my appetite (**D4**) | | | | | |
| I suddenly become dizzy or faint when there is no reason for this (**A7**) | | | | | |
| I have to do some things over and over again (like washing my hands, cleaning or putting things in a certain order) (**A8**) | | | | | |
| I have no energy for things (**D5**) | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I suddenly start to tremble or shake when there is no reason for this (**A9**) | | | | | |
| I cannot think clearly (**D6**) | | | | | |
| I feel worthless (**D7)** | | | | | |
| I have to think of special thoughts (like numbers or words) to stop bad things from happening (**A10**) | | | | | |
| I feel like I don't want to move (**D8**) | | | | | |
| I worry that I will suddenly get a scared feeling when there is nothing to be afraid of (**A11**) | | | | | |
| I am tired a lot (**D9**) | | | | | |

**Depressive Symptoms**: D1-D9

**Anxiety Symptoms:** A1-A11

## Appendix F: Hip-Hop Measures

### Rap Music

Please report on your hip-hop/rap music usage (e.g., radio, iPod, MP3s, Spotify).

1. How many hours on a typical **weekday** do you listen to hip-hop/rap music?
2. How many hours on a typical **Saturday or Sunday** do you listen to hip-hop/rap music?

### Rap Music Video

Please report on your hip-hop/rap music video (e.g., BET, MTV, YouTube, etc.).

1. How many hours on a typical weekday do you watch hip-hop/rap music videos?
2. How many hours on a typical Saturday or Sunday do you watch hip-hop/rap music videos?

### Hip-Hop Media

We are would like to know more about your engagement with hip-hop media online.

| | Never (1) | Rarely (2) | Few times/Yr (3) | Few times/Month (4) | Weekly (5) | Daily (6) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How often do you listen to urban and/ or hip-hop radio stations? | | | | | | |
| How often do you listen to hip-hop podcasts (e.g., Combat Jack Show, Brilliant Idiots, Tax Season? | | | | | | |
| How often do you watch online hip-hop video shows (e.g., The Breakfast Club, Sway in the Morning, Ebro in the Morning, DJ Vlad)? | | | | | | |
| How often do you visit hip-hop blogs and websites (e.g., XXLmag.com, thesource.com, allhiphop.com)? | | | | | | |

**Hip-Hop Artists Social Media**

We would like to learn more about your interaction with hip-hop/rap artists online. Below, discuss how often you engage in the following behaviors:

| | Never (1) | Rarely (2) | Few times/Yr (3) | Few times/Month (4) | Weekly (5) | Daily (6) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Visit hip-hop/rap artists' social media profiles (e.g., Twitter, Snapchat, Facebook) | | | | | | |
| Like hip-hop/rap artists' post on social media | | | | | | |
| Retweet or repost hip-hop/rap artists' post on social media | | | | | | |
| Respond to post from hip-hop/rap artists' post on social media | | | | | | |
| Contact hip-hop/rap artists on social media (e.g., direct) messages | | | | | | |
| Discuss or share information about hip-hop/rap artists on your social media account | | | | | | |

**Empowering and Violent-Misogynistic Rap Perceptions**
Rap Music Attitude and Perception (Tyson, 2005)

**In the section below, report on the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about Rap music.**

| | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neither agree nor disagree (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly agree (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rap music has positive themes that uplift and empower people. ( 2) | | | | | |
| Some rap music teaches youth how to make it through bad times. ( 3) | | | | | |
| Youth relate to rap music because it is about their reality. (4) | | | | | |
| Some rap music represents a form of resistance to oppressive conditions. (5) | | | | | |
| Sexually explicit rap music causes males to be sexually explicit with females. (6) | | | | | |
| Violent rap music videos can lead males to be more violent. (7) | | | | | |
| Rap music is a progression of African and African American storytelling. (8) | | | | | |
| There are very important messages in rap. (9) | | | | | |
| Rap music expresses negative attitudes towards homosexuality. (10) | | | | | |
| Most rap music suggests women are just for male sexual satisfaction. (11) | | | | | |
| I like rap music for its content and its messages. (13) | | | | | |
| Competition between rappers is dangerous and leads to violence. (18) | | | | | |
| Rap music projects macho attitudes. (19) | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rap music helps youth cope with their reality. (20) | | | | | |
| Rap music encourages ethnic group pride. (21) | | | | | |
| Rap music is a healthy resistance against the system. (22) | | | | | |
| Violence in rap videos contributes to aggressive behaviors. (23) | | | | | |
| Sexism in rap videos contributes to sexist behaviors. (24) | | | | | |
| Rap music glorifies drugs and violence. (25) | | | | | |
| Rap reflects the realities of drugs and violence in society. (26) | | | | | |

**Rap Empowerment Perceptions Subscale**

2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 13, 20, 21, 22, 26

**Rap Violent-Misogynistic Perceptions Subscale**

6, 7, 10, 11, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25

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